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Ethics in the Gospel of John

Discipleship as Moral Progress

By

Sookgoo Shin

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Soli deo gloria.

Sookgoo Shin
Kuala Lumpur
1 August 2018

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AEJT	*Australian ejournal of Theology*
AnBib	*Analecta Biblica*
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
AThR.SS	*Anglican Theological Review, Supplementary Series*
ATJ	*Ashland Theological Journal*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
Chm	*Churchman*
CI	*Critical Inquiry*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CTQ	*Concordia Theological Quarterly*
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
CV	*Communio Viatorum*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
EvQ	*The Evangelical Quarterly*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
IDS	*In die Skriflig*
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHP	*Journal of the History of Philosophy*

JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTI	*Journal of Theological Interpretation*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
KAIROS-EJT	*Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*
LBS	Linguistic Biblical Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LTP	*Laval théologique et philosophique*
MTZ	*Münchener theologisch Zeitschrif*
NCB	New Century Bible
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTL	The New Testament Library
NTM	New Testament Monographs
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PPS	*Perspectives on Psychological Science*
Presb	*Presbyterion*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
RB	*Revue biblique*
RelStTh	*Religious Studies and Theology*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
Sales	*Salesianum*
SANt	Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBFA	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
ScEccl	*Sciences Ecclésiastiques*
SCHNT	Studia ad corpus hellenisticum Novi Testamenti
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
Sophia	*Sophia: Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*

STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TS	*Theological Studies*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WW	*Word & World*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

PART 1

Moral Transformation in Worldview

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

New Testament ethics (henceforth NTE) is no longer a subset of New Testament theology, but it has managed to establish itself as an independent field in NTE; an increase in publication on various aspects of NTE in recent decades confirms such a trend. Despite increasing interest in NTE, the Gospel of John has been an unwelcome outsider when it comes to the discussion of ethics. In fact, the Gospel of John has been accused of being morally bankrupt,[1] being a major challenge in NTE,[2] a puzzling book for ethical enquiry,[3] and not being ethical enough to be included in NTE.[4] No one has been, however, more sceptical than Wayne Meeks about the value of John's ethics, and he gives four reasons for why the Gospel of John cannot be "a vehicle of moral formation"[5] as follows: The Gospel of John 1) does not provide explicit ethical teachings; 2) does not have any adequate moral agent who can guide others in moral behaviour; 3) offers an unusual narrative world that is against rational moral discourse; 4) seems to advocate determinism, which blurs one's ethical responsibilities.[6] Furthermore, the only passage that is unanimously considered ethical in the Gospel is the love commandment in 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you are to love one another," and even this passage has been criticised for promoting a "conventicle ethic."[7] Whether

1 Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1986), 122.

2 Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 92.

3 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 138.

4 Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 297.

5 Wayne A. Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–326 (318).

6 Meeks, "Ethics," 318–320. For a helpful critique of Meeks' argument, see D. Moody Smith, "Ethics and Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (eds. John Painter, R. Alan. Culpepper and Fernando F. Segovia; St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 109–122; Robin Plant, "Is John's Gospel Ethically Defective?," *KAIROS-EJT* 6 (2012): 7–21.

7 Michael Labahn, "'It's Only Love'—Is That All?: Limits and Potentials of Johannine "Ethic"—A Critical Evaluation of Research," in *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings* (eds. Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 291; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 3–43 (28). For those who share a similar view of Johannine love as particularistic, see C.G. Montefiore, "Notes on the Religious Value of the Fourth Gospel," *JQR* 7

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or not one agrees with Meeks' and others' negative evaluation of John's ethics, what they have argued concerning the inadequacy of John's ethics still echoes powerfully, and the burden of proving otherwise lies heavily on the shoulders of those who believe in the relevance of John's ethics. Most of the journal articles that explore recent Johannine scholarship also do not usually contain a section on John's ethics or simply mention it in passing.[8]

Is this really a fair judgment of John's ethics? Are we not failing to recognise John's ethical framework that may be implicitly imbedded within his narratives and intricately intertwined with his theology? Are we not also failing to see the true value of John's ethics because we are using and influenced by the modern concept of ethics, which may be inadequate for the exploration of ancient ethics? In 2010 scholars gathered in Nijmegen, Netherlands, to discuss various aspects of John's ethics and to propose promising areas of research that need to be further investigated.[9] The papers presented at the conference were later published under the subtitle, "Implicit Ethics in the Johannine Writings," which seems to signify the fact that John's ethics may not be explicit in its content, but "it is [still] justifiable to speak of a motive for action in the sense of 'ethics' or better of 'implicit ethics.'"[10] Before moving on to set the boundary of ethics and

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(1894): 24–74; C.B. Bowen, "Love in the Fourth Gospel," *JR* 13 (1933): 39–49; Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*. (trans. Gerhard Krodel; London: SCM, 1968), 65. Meier also thinks that John's love is too vague to be useful. John P. Meier, "Love in Q and John: Love of Enemies, Love of One Another" *Mid-Stream* 40 (2001): 42–50 (47–48).

8 The following articles mention John's ethics only in passing. Francis J. Moloney, "Johannine Studies in the Australia-Pacific Region," *AEJT* 19 (2012): 1–14; Francis J. Moloney, "Recent Johannine Studies: Part Two: Monographs," *ExpTim* 123 (2012): 417–428; Klaus Scholtissek, "Johannine Studies: A Survey of Recent Research with Special Regard to German Contributions," *CurBS* 9 (2001): 277–305. One of the first Johannine introductory books that includes a section on John's ethics is a work by Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 509–524.

9 For a general overview of John's ethics, see Labahn, "Only Love," 3–43; Ruben Zimmermann, "Is there Ethics in the Gospel of John?: Challenging an Outdated Consensus," *John's Ethics*, 44–80; Johannes Nissen, "Community and Ethics in the Gospel of John," in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives* (eds. Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen; JSNTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 194–212; Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Prinzipiell-theologische Ethik in der johanneischen Literatur," in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ* (eds. Friedrich W. Horn and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 289–307. For a theological reflection on John's ethics, see Christopher R.J. Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

10 Ruben Zimmermann, "Ethics in the New Testament and Language: Basic Explorations and Eph 5:21–33 as Test Case," in *Moral Language in the New Testament: The Interrelatedness of Language and Ethics in Early Christian Writing* (eds. Ruben Zimmermann and Jan G. van der Watt; WUNT II/296; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 19–50 (23). See also pp. 24–28,

to search for an ethical model and research strategy, we need to first examine how scholars have tried to find 'implicit ethics' in the Gospel of John.

1 Overview of Recent Scholarship on John's Ethics

Since most of the significant works on John's ethics have appeared in the last ten years and there is no significant interaction among scholars, it is difficult to survey the writings in an organically interconnected manner.[11] Thus I will try to examine the works by categorising them into distinguishable groups based on their general methodological objectives. The works that are categorised into the same group may be different from each other in some aspects as categories are not always watertight, but these categories can still help us see different ways of studying John's ethics and thus may show us the way forward.

1.1 *The Role of the Law in John's Ethics*

Though many works have been written on the role of the law and its relationship to Jesus in the Gospel of John,[12] its influence on John's ethics has been rather neglected. Despite the pivotal role the law plays in the Gospel, some scholars think that regarding the law as the background of John's ethics is stretching too far the actual role that the law plays in the Gospel. William Loader argues that the law is no longer the basis of John's ethics, and he examines numerous passages that portray Jesus as overriding the law with his divine authority. According to Loader, Jesus's healing of the lame man in John 5 and of the blind man in John 9 shows that Jesus's authority as the Son of God has priority over the Sabbath law, and Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 reveals that Jesus has replaced the temple with himself.[13] Besides these passages, Loader also argues that the six stone jars in 2:6 signify the incompleteness of the law, and the lack of appeal to the law in his farewell speeches emphasises the fact that "only obeying Christ matters."[14] In other words, the role of the law was to help people understand who Jesus was and recognise

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where Zimmermann helpfully suggests eight criteria for finding implicit ethics in the New Testament.

11 The chapters on John's ethics found in general NTE books will not be considered here.

12 For the most comprehensive treatment of the law in John's Gospel, see Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975).

13 William R.G. Loader, "The Law and Ethics in John's Gospel," *John's Ethics*, 143–158 (146–147).

14 Loader, "Law," 155.

Jesus when he came to his own people.[15] Loader does not think, however, that John denies the law altogether but rather "John appears to deal with the discontinuity not by disparaging the old law but by understanding its application, at least with regard to cultic law … depicting it as foreshadowing what was to come and now in Jesus has come, and so no longer to be observed."[16] Loader concludes by underlining that what Moses has given to the people of Israel was not bad in itself, but what Jesus came to give and fulfill was simply better.[17]

In line with but more balanced than Loader, Lund also believes that the law is no longer an authoritative guide for the Jews in terms of ethical living since "Jesus is presented as the true fulfilment of the very things that the Jews had looked to the Torah to provide."[18] As an example, he argues how true worship is not offered anymore in the temple of Jerusalem but rather in the person of Jesus Christ. Lund, however, admits that John does not dismiss the law as obsolete, but rather "transfers its meaning and realization to Jesus"[19] that one is now made clean not by following the law but by being in relationship with Jesus. Lund identifies five moral commands in the Gospel, of which two are given by God to Jesus and the other three by Jesus to the disciples. First, Jesus

15 Loader, "Law," ibid.

16 Loader, "Law," 154.

17 Van der Watt also takes a similar approach and surveys the actions and intentions of the opponents in the Gospel to see what John considers right and wrong. First, van der Watt states that neither Jesus nor the Jews view the law negatively, but what really matters for John is the way the opponents interpret the law. The opponents think that they are keeping the law by trying to kill Jesus and his followers, but John accuses the Jews for not using the right criteria in interpreting the law. The opponents not only misinterpret the law but also the actions of Jesus. If they truly understood that it was Jesus to whom the law was pointing, they would have worshipped him as the Son of God, but they failed to see who Jesus was as they were judging Jesus from a wrong perspective. Without being in relationship with Jesus, one will not be able to interpret the law correctly and thus will not be able to act righteously. Sin, in the Gospel of John, then is not so much about failing to keep certain aspects of the law but is all about a conscious rejection to believe in Jesus. Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics of/and the Opponents of Jesus in John's Gospel," *John's Ethics*, 175–191. See also Jan G. van der Watt, "Radical Social Redefinition and Radical Love: Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel according to John," in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 107–133 (112–114).

18 Glen Lund, "The Joys and Dangers of Ethics in John's Gospel," *John's Ethics*, 264–289 (271). Lund does not support the idea that John may have intentionally left ethical teachings out since the original readers had access to the gospel traditions, which would provide them with ample ethical commands. If John had known the Synoptics at the time of writing, according to Lund, John must have had much more in common with them. Lund, "Joys," 273.

19 Lund, "Joys," 271.

is bound by two imperatives—Jesus is to faithfully represent God by doing and saying as instructed by the Father (8:28; 12:49–50) and to complete the mission of God (4:34). On the other hand, the disciples are to keep Jesus's example and word(s)[20] (14:23–24; cf. 12:47–48), and finally to take the truth to the world (17:18; 20:21).[21]

Lund thinks that the vague nature of John's ethics may be due to the fact that the ethical living in the Gospel is based on the intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ and offers freedom to the disciples to experience more fully the guidance of the Spirit given that they are bound by the three overarching commands mentioned above. But the dangers, according to Lund, certainly exist as this relational ethics could lead to "self-satisfied conceit," and "inconsistent, fickle and myopic morality."[22] Lund thinks we see a more concrete and developed ethics in the Epistles of John because this Spirit-led but vague ethics may not have been specific enough for the new ethical challenges faced by later Christians. But Lund argues that the author(s) of the Epistles still upheld the basic ethical framework of the Gospel of John but had to add some prescriptive standards to their writings as the people's memory and knowledge of Jesus's actions and words were not as fresh as the eyewitnesses to correctly judge ethical matters within the community. Lund's emphasis on following Jesus's deeds and words presents 'the imitation of Jesus'[23] as a possible hermeneutical tool to investigate John's ethics.

---

20 The 'words' in the plural in these passages refer to Jesus's teachings in his earthly ministry but Lund thinks that even the 'word' in the singular may also refer to Jesus's teachings. With this interpretation, Lund argues that "the instruction to "keep my word" (14:23) would place an obligation on the disciples to safeguard Jesus's memory in order to live faithfully to what [Jesus] has taught them and perpetuate his words and deeds." Lund, "Joys," 275–276.

21 I agree with Lund that one cannot make a sharp distinction between "religious" and "ethical" directives because "[t]o know Jesus is to know his morality." Lund, "Joys," 276.

22 Lund, "Joys," 285.

23 Van der Merwe approaches John's ethics in light of *Imitatio Christi* which he believes to be related to the agency motif in the Gospel. He argues that John's ethics is not about giving out specific moral guidelines but all about being called and sent to the world to perform the deeds of the sender by imitating certain aspects of Jesus's life. First, he argues that the ἀκολουθέω language has implications for imitation. The primary role the disciples must imitate after Jesus is the role of a shepherd, which signifies the importance of "participating in gathering the Messianic harvest" (134). Then he also suggests that the fact that Jesus shows the ὑπόδειγμα through various motifs throughout the Gospel calls for imitation, which is further emphasised by John's use of καθὼς. After all, van der Merwe argues that "the *Imitatio Christi* is the test for the authenticity of the Christian character" (147). D.G. van der Merwe, "'*Imitatio Christi*' in the Fourth Gospel," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 22 (2001): 131–148. Cf. Similarly, Bennema also believes that a concept of 'following Jesus' carries

Jey J. Kanagaraj takes a narrower approach and focuses primarily on the influence of the Decalogue on John's ethics. Kanagaraj believes that John, as a Jew, must have been trained in a tradition in which the Decalogue functioned as the guiding moral principle.[24] Due to the significant role the Decalogue played in the Jewish religious world, Kanagaraj further argues that the Decalogue must have been the "backdrop" for John's love command, which in turn is the summary of the law. To prove his point, he makes a distinction between ἐντολή and ἐντολαί based on the fact that the former refers to "the Christ-revelation as a comprehensive whole,"[25] whereas the latter indicates "the individual components of Jesus's requirements."[26] For him, ἐντολαί (14:15, 21; 15:10 [2×]) points to the content of the Decalogue, which forms the basis of John's ethics. Though Kanagaraj does not argue for "a coherent and systematic use of the Decalogue"[27] in the Gospel, he nonetheless believes that the Decalogue is implicitly embedded in John's narratives and is reinterpreted positively, redemptively, and christologically in light of the truth Jesus brings. For example, the First Commandment is reinterpreted positively and christologically as to include Jesus as the object of worship since both God and Jesus are one (10:30), and the passages like 3:18, 6:29, 14:1, 12:36, 20:31 clearly show that "a faith commitment to the God who was revealed in the Logos incarnate is fundamental to ethics."[28] In a similar vein Kanagaraj goes through all the Ten Commandments and explores how John has reinterpreted them throughout his narratives.

Whether or not the law or more specifically the Decalogue should be used as a moral category in the investigation of John's ethics is still contested among scholars. Those who see the value of the law (the Decalogue) in John's ethics may argue that it helps readers find ethical dimensions in John's narratives that would not be so obvious otherwise, whereas those who find the law (the Decalogue) invalid in John's Gospel might express concerns regarding the danger of reducing John's ethics to a list of rigid rules. The analysis of these writings above clearly presents us with a question that must be considered in order to fully appreciate John's moral paradigm, that is whether faith in Jesus Christ makes the law redundant as a moral guide in the lives of believers.

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connotations of imitation. Cornelis Bennema, *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature: A Study in Johannine Ethics* (LNTS 498; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 83–87.

24 Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Implied Ethics of the Fourth Gospel: A Reinterpretation of the Decalogue," *TynBul* 52 (2001): 33–60 (37).

25 Kanagaraj, "Implied Ethics," 36.

26 Kanagaraj, "Implied Ethics," ibid.

27 Kanagaraj, "Implied Ethics," ibid.

28 Kanagaraj, "Implied Ethics," 40.

1.2 *Exploring Possible Conceptual or Historical Backgrounds for John's Ethics*

Another approach scholars have taken is to examine various contemporary ideas or literature in order to find possible conceptual or historical bases for John's ethics. Scholars in this category have suggested various backgrounds and argued that John's ethics is influenced either directly or indirectly by contemporary thought or literary conventions through a shared milieu.

Andrew Glicksman claims that the Johannine Jesus is described as "a manifestation of Sophia" as portrayed in Proverbs 8, the Wisdom of Ben Sira 24, and the Wisdom of Solomon 6–10[29] and argues for the influence of Wisdom[30] in John's ethics by examining the similarities and differences between Sophia and the Johannine Jesus in three areas: origin and trajectory of mission, metaphorical language, and relational language. In terms of the origin and trajectory of mission, Jesus and Sophia are similar since they exist and are with God before the creation of all things but are different since Sophia was created by God (Prov 8:22–31; Sir 1:4a), whereas Jesus is eternal and divine (John 1:1–3). Sophia and Jesus overlap also in the area of metaphorical language. These two figures are both described as light, but Sophia is only the reflection of divine light (Wis 7:26), whereas Jesus himself is the light that reveals the Father's plan of salvation (John 1:9; 8:12). They are also both portrayed as food and drink; Sophia does not fully satisfy the hunger and thirst of seekers (Prov 9:1–6; Sir 24:13–21), but Jesus gives his followers food and drink that quench thirst and hunger completely (John 6:32). Finally, Sophia and Jesus share the similar relational language by which their relationship with God and people is represented. For both Sophia and Jesus, "obedience is an important prerequisite for showing love"[31] but it is Jesus who is closer to God relationally since only Jesus is said to reciprocate love he receives from his Father. The fact that Jesus surpasses Sophia, which the Jews identified as the law, in every criteria as seen above shows that the Jews no longer need to depend on the Torah for moral behaviour since Jesus replaces the wisdom with his words and actions. Since Jesus took on human flesh unlike Sophia, one can follow and imitate the example of Jesus

29 Andrew T. Glicksman, "Beyond Sophia: The Sapiential Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and Its Ethical Implications for the Johannine Community," *John's Ethics*, 83–101 (83).

30 Cf. Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 18–27; Michael E. Willet, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen, 1992); Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992).

31 Glicksman, "Sophia," 97.

(13:15), and the message of Jesus's footwashing echoes even more powerfully as "it foreshadows the self-giving salvific sacrifice of his death and enriches the forthcoming command 'love one another as I have loved you' (15:12)."[32]

Erik Eynikel in a similar manner tries to explore the basis of John's ethics by evaluating the influence of Qumran on John's dualism. Though Eynikel thinks that both John and Qumran have a dualistic worldview (light/darkness, truth/wickedness, etc.), these entities in John, according to Eynikel, are very different from that of Qumran in terms of nature and sources.[33] The spirits in Qumran are created by God, but they act freely and independently both in the world and human beings. However, in John Jesus is not only the light of the world, but the Spirit is also the Spirit of Jesus who gives life (6:63)—Christology and pneumatology go hand in hand in the Gospel.[34] John also uses the different name for the evil Spirit, the Satan, and the struggle is no longer between the good and the bad spirits but rather between God and the Satan. Although it is the Father who initiates a process of salvation (6:44) in John, this does not mean that a human being is passive in its process. Jesus is rather offering everyone a chance to choose light instead of darkness (12:35), and remaining in darkness is one's deliberate choice (3:19–20). What is different for Qumran is that only those who belong to the community can either choose light or darkness, but those who are outside the community are automatically doomed for destruction. Eynikel finally argues that the fact that everyone is offered an opportunity to believe in Jesus as Saviour, but not all will accept that offer shows that John's soteriology is at tension, and this further shows that John may be working with the elements of dualism and determinism found in the Qumran writings.

Unlike Glicksman and Eynikel who explore the basis of John's ethics in light of contemporary ideas, János Bolyki tries to reveal the hidden ethical dimensions of John's Gospel by comparing ethical conflicts in the Gospel with those of ancient dramas.[35] Bolyki argues that ethical conflict is the main theme in drama because "the tragedy itself is an imitation of human deeds and these human deeds are nothing else but individual decisions hardened into customs which we call the character/personality or ethos of a person."[36] It is common in ancient tragedies for a hero to have "an adversary of equal quality,"[37] and John

32 Glicksman, "Sophia," 101.

33 Erik Eynikel, "The Qumran Background of Johannine Ethics," *John's Ethics*, 102–113.

34 Eynikel, "Qumran," 109.

35 For the most comprehensive treatment of John as Greek tragedy, see Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).

36 János Bolyki, "Ethics in the Gospel of John," *CV* 45 (2003): 198–208 (198).

37 Bolyki, "Ethics," 198.

presents two major adversaries, the Jewish religious leaders and Roman authorities represented by Pilate. First, there is a fundamental conflict between Jesus and Jewish religious leaders; Jesus wants the Jews to believe in him, whereas the Jews want to excommunicate those who believe in Jesus. Second, there is a "conflict of opposing programs" between Jesus and the Roman Empire.[38] Bolyki believes that these conflicts are caused not only by theological/religious differences but also by the fact that Jesus brings new ethical values (e.g. footwashing) that overturn the traditional Jewish and Greco-Roman ethical paradigms.[39] Furthermore, Bolyki argues that any community's ethical paradigm is formed "within the frames of a moral story or a story of origin." For example, the ancient Greek world has its origin in the conflicts of the heroic gods, which form the background for their morals. On the other hand, the Jewish society has its origin in the Exodus story, and the Torah becomes their moral background. For the earliest Christians, however, Jesus himself and his teachings become the background of their moral framework. Bolyki believes that John's moral story takes a shape similar to Greek tragedies, and he labels John's moral story as "dualistic universality."[40] It is 'dualistic' since individuals must either accept or reject the way of salvation that Jesus offers, and it is also 'universal' since John's moral story was not only for Jews but also for the rest of the world including the whole Roman Empire.[41]

Finally, Volker Rabens sees 'ethical enabling' to be the most important aspect of Johannine ethics and examines it in the context of Stoicism and Philo. Ethical enabling, according to Rabens, is "religious-ethical life enabled through the experience of divine love in an intimate relationship to Jesus Christ and the Father … [and] the Spirit Paraclete plays an important role in this 'relational empowering'."[42] In light of this definition, Rabens thinks that Stoicism cannot be the background of John's ethical enabling since Stoicism understood the Spirit as a material substance and all-permeating, whereas in John the Spirit cannot be recognised and accepted by the world. Furthermore, the Spirit in Stoicism has nothing to do with ethics but only with physics, and one's transformation was enabled not by the work of the divine as seen in John but rather

38 Bolyki, "Ethics," 200.

39 Unlike the civil perspective which judges people based on their actions and motives, Bolyki argues that Jesus's deeds are "characterized by the mission he has received from God." Bolyki, "Ethics," 206.

40 Bolyki, "Ethics," 207.

41 Bolyki, "Ethics," ibid.

42 Volker Rabens, "Johannine Perspectives on Ethical Enabling in the Context of Stoic and Philonic Ethics," *John's Ethics*, 114–139 (115).

by "philosophy and active reasoning."[43] On the issue of relational empowering in John, Rabens disagrees with van der Watt on two important points. First, van der Watt believes that the basis of love is not emotion but relationships that are expressed in actions, but for Rabens, emotions and affection are important part of intimate relationships (15:11), which function as "the enabling basis of the disciples' love."[44] The second difference is that van der Watt perceives obedience as the basis of ethical behaviour which merits God's consequential love, but Rabens argues that the loving relationship that believers have with Jesus is the basis of obedience which leads to further love. Rabens suggests that the best way to investigate these empowering dynamics is to see Johannine ethics in the context of family and friendship (15:15).[45] His evaluation of Philo is much more positive than that of Stoicism because unlike Stoicism, Philo emphasised the role of the Spirit in relational empowering that results in virtuous life. Therefore, Rabens concludes that Philo is much closer to and compatible with John's Gospel than Stoicism in terms of the role of the Holy Spirit in ethical life.

As seen above, narrowing a conceptual or historical[46] background of John's ethics to one particular area may be helpful for understanding John's ethical basis but may also run the risk of overlooking other aspects of John's ethics which may not fall under that particular background. Moreover, some of the scholars in this category often limit their investigation only to finding similarities in terms of background without giving enough attention to the text itself. The relative lack of interest in the text further leads scholars to overlook the literary style of John's Gospel which determines how John's moral message is communicated to readers. Thus some studies in this category seem to raise more questions than they answer by failing to give due attention to the text and the literary characteristics of the Gospel.

43 Rabens, "Enabling," 119.

44 Rabens, "Enabling," 122.

45 On the theme of family, see Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (BibInt 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000). For friendship, see Martin M. Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John* (NTM 30; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010).

46 For a study on John's ethics from a historical perspective, see Paul N. Anderson, "Discernment-Oriented Leadership in the Johannine Situation—Abiding in the Truth Versus Lesser Alternatives," *John's Ethics*, 290–318.

1.3 *Linguistic-Semantic Analysis of Johannine Terms or Phrases to Expose Hidden Ethical Meanings*

It is well known that John's Gospel is full of terms and phrases that are highly symbolic and theological in their meaning and usage. For that reason scholars have tried to discover ethical implications of various Johannine concepts in the Gospel and have made some significant findings in this regard.

Van der Watt is one of the first few who explores John's perception of ethical behaviour by looking at three important ideas in the Gospel—*doing the will of God*, *being good*,[47] and *sin*. First, van der Watt thinks that the most essential background of ethical action in the Gospel lies in John 6:28 where the crowd asks Jesus this very important question, τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ. For him, this is an ethical question that asks about "the required behaviour to please God and receive eternal life."[48] Van der Watt argues that faith in Jesus is "the heart and essence of all ethical actions that will determine any consequent behaviour," and thus the question in John 6:28 is "an ethical question in its purest form."[49] In fact, if the crowd had the requirements of the commandments in mind, the term "works"[50] could indicate that the crowd was actually asking an ethical question.[51] Jesus's answer is, however, unexpected and even puzzling to those who think that keeping the law is the highest form of moral behaviour. As Jesus redefines the Decalogue, for example, by overrid-

47 Van der Watt also writes on John's concept of 'good' and 'truth' elsewhere. Jan G. van der Watt, "Reflections on Doing What is Good and True in the Gospel of John," in *Ethische Normen des frühen Christentums* (eds. Friedrich W. Horn, et al.; WUNT 313; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 73–92; Jan G. van der Watt, "The Good and Truth in John's Gospel," in *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes: Festschrift für Jean Zumstein zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Andreas Dettwiler and Uta Poplutz; Zürich: TVZ, 2009), 317–334.

48 Jan G. van der Watt, "The Gospel of John's Perception of Ethical Behaviour," *IDS* 45 (2011): 431–447 (433). He also adds that in Mark 10:17 the young man asks a similar question, and there Jesus answers by focusing on the "requirements of the law," whereas in John Jesus focuses on the person of Jesus himself by saying, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύητε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος. The way Matthew puts this question in 19:16 highlights the ethical dimension more powerfully by inserting the adjective ἀγαθὸν—τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω ἵνα σχῶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

49 van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 433. Van der Watt does not think that the Jews disparaged 'works' as an inferior or invalid form of devotion to God or ethics, but John here seems to redefine what true works are in light of the new standard Jesus brings.

50 The plural form ἔργα may indicate that the crowd was indeed referring to the specific legal requirements. van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 434–435.

51 Here van der Watt points out that Keener also argues that "works" in 6:28 carries an ethical nuance. See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (II vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:678.

ing the Sabbath law with his authority, van der Watt argues that Jesus redefines ethics as no longer based on works, but based on faith in Jesus that leads to good works.

Van der Watt then tackles another important Johannine concept, faith, by comparing it with a work of God. According to him, "salvific faith in the Gospel of John is a self-sacrificing, intellectual, and existential acceptance of the message and person of Jesus to the extent that it completely transforms a person's thoughts and deeds in accordance with this message and leads to an obedient life of doing what a child of God should do."[52] Faith is a work because one needs to make a conscious decision to believe in Jesus as the Son of God who brings true light to a world full of darkness (8:12). Having identified faith as the basis of ethical life, van der Watt moves on to examine how truth[53] is used in the Gospel as a morally significant term. The truth, which is contrasted with the law in 1:17, refers to an intimate relation with Jesus in whom we witness a shift from "the juridical (law) to personal relations as the ethical basis."[54] In other words, truth in John is an absolute norm by which one must measure and judge his or her moral actions. Without embodying this truth, one will remain under the power of the devil (8:44) and thus will not be able to perform deeds that are acceptable to God. For van der Watt, the essence of sin is unwillingness to believe in Jesus, and this unwillingness signals a person's willingness to join the family of the devil who is the source of every hate, murder (3:20; 8:44; 15:18 ff.), lies (8:44), theft (12:6), and seeking self-honour (5:44; 15:19).[55] In conclusion, since Jesus is the truth himself (14:6) and truth carries an ethical meaning as explained above, doing and seeking the truth is to have relationship with Jesus and therefore, John's ethics is fundamentally relational.

Van der Watt in another work examines John's ethics by analysing the role of language in John 8 in light of John's most fundamental ethical act, namely, one's belief in Jesus Christ (20:28–31).[56] Van der Watt pays attention to various literary techniques used in John's narratives and examines how John's rhetorical power shapes John's moral vision by dividing his discussion into four categories: 1) Words and Ethics, 2) Breaks in the Structural Flow of the Argument, 3) Discourse grammar, 4) Imagery. First, van der Watt looks at how specific words and

52 van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 436.

53 See his article for a detailed discussion on truth, van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 440–442.

54 van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 441.

55 van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 444.

56 Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics through the Power of Language: Some Explorations in the Gospel according to John," *Moral Language*, 139–167.

literary devices are used to convey ethical ideas. He argues that words like ἁμαρτία, ἀκολουθέω, μένω, etc. have ethical implications, and literary devices such as irony challenge readers to believe in Jesus. He also suggests that the contextual-semantic analysis of a word is crucial since a word can have different meanings to different persons with different perspectives (e.g. for the Jews killing Jesus is a rightful execution but from the perspective of Jesus it is murder). Secondly, van der Watt goes on to examine how literary techniques such as openness, discontinuous and conflicting dialogue[57] function in the narratives. These techniques invite readers to engage personally with the texts and encourage them to see and decide who has the truth (Jews or Jesus). Thirdly, van der Watt examines some of Jesus's propositions or proverbial statements (8:12, 14, 23, 28, 29, 38, 41, and 44) about himself on which John builds his ethical foundations. Here he argues that unless one accepts these propositions about Jesus, one's ethical arguments will not be valid, and he uses another literary tool, characterization, to explore John's ethics by examining how a character in the narrative reacts and behaves in light of his or her relationship with Jesus.[58] Finally, van der Watt looks at the function of imagery[59] in ch. 8 where Jesus is described as the light of the world and believers are said to have the light of life (8:12). Based on this verse, van der Watt emphasises that one's behaviour can only be judged in light because darkness hides their true intentions and actions, and life here implies that one now acts according to the perspective of God's family.

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57 For a detailed description of these terms, see van der Watt, "Power of Language," 152–153.

58 Recently Cornelis Bennema argues that virtue ethics can shed light on John's ethics through character studies. He believes that characters in the Gospel can function as moral agents and that we can learn about John's ethical vision by analysing characters' behaviour in light of cardinal virtues found in Plato's *Republic*. Bennema investigates five characters (Peter, Nicodemus, Samaritan Woman, The Man Born Blind, and Pilate) in five categories (Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Courage, and Faith/Belief), and surprisingly, the man born blind scores highest in this evaluation, and Pilate turned out to be least desirable. Although Bennema recognises some of the similarities between John's and virtue ethics, the ultimate good for John is all about "being in a life-giving relationship with the Father and Son." Cornelis Bennema, "Virtue Ethics in the Gospel of John: The Johannine Characters as Moral Agents," in *Rediscovering John: Essays on the Fourth Gospel in Honour of Frédéric Manns* (ed. L.D. Chrupcala; SBF 80; Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2013), 167–181.

59 Van der Watt in another book examines how John uses imagery to express the ethical dimensions of John's Gospel. He looks at various imageries such as filial relationship, education, origin, freedom, and mission, and evaluates how these different imageries function as the primary tool by which John formulates his moral vision. See Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics Alive in Imagery," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John* (eds. Jörg Frey, et al.; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 421–447.

Christos Karakolis similarly examines the seven semeia-narratives and analyses how σημεῖον and ἔργον contribute to our understanding of John's ethics. Karakolis defines σημεῖον[60] as "any deeds of Jesus that even slightly bear a supernatural character and therefore are an indirect call towards people to believe in him."[61] On the other hand, the word τὸ ἔργον in the singular with the definite article signifies "the soteriological activity of Jesus as a whole (4:34; 17:4)," whereas ἔργον without the definite article or ἔργα in the plural refers to "concrete deeds of Jesus that normally bear a miraculous character, thereby revealing his divine sonship (5:20; 36; 7:21; 9:3–4; 10:25, 32, 37–38; 14:10–11; 15:24)."[62] Karakolis thinks that both 'signs' and 'works' in John are interconnected because they both show the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God. According to Karakolis, ἔργον also refers to works that "exhibit a consistent moral character,"[63] and the quality of one's work is judged by one's faith in Jesus (3:19–21). Similarly, Jesus's works carry ethical dimensions especially in light of family ethics since they are the fulfilment of the Father's will (4:34), reveal God's works to the world (5:20), and are done in obedience to his Father (5:36). This family-oriented love, however, does not exclude the world as already condemned[64] but rather reaches its peak in Jesus's obedient and loving sacrifice for

60 Similarly, Hans Boersma analyses the selected narratives in the *Book of signs* (ch. 2–12) and argues that these narratives have three functions: redemptive (indicating the arrival of the new age), legitimating (legitimatising Jesus as the Son of God), and paraenetic (demanding trust in Jesus as the Son of God). As the signs in the Exodus show God's almighty power, Jesus's signs in the Gospel also have a similar function of signalling the new messianic age (new exodus). This paradigm shift brought by the coming of Jesus has significant implications in terms of the Sabbath, Torah, works and love. See Hans Boersma, "A New Age Love Story: Worldview and Ethics in the Gospel of John," *CTJ* 38 (2003): 103–119.

61 Christos Karakolis, "Semeia Conveying Ethics in the Gospel according to John," *John's Ethics*, 192–212 (195).

62 Karakolis, "Semeia," 196.

63 Karakolis, "Semeia," 198. Hermut Löhr also approaches John's ethics by looking at ἔργον as an element of moral language in the Gospel. He examines six passages (3:19; 6:28; 7:3; 8:39, 41; 10:32–33; 14:12) and evaluates whether ἔργον in those passages expresses the moral quality of the deeds. See Hermut Löhr, "ἔργον as an Element of Moral Language in John," *John's Ethics*, 229–249.

64 Skinner rightly argues that "the sectarian critique of Johannine love [is] lacking in both nuance and interpretive imagination. It does not seem impossible for the Johannine vision of sacrificial self-giving to be applied broadly, and with benefit, to those who do not share the same confession or community ties as the Johannine believer." Christopher W. Skinner, "Virtue in the New Testament: The Legacies of Paul and John in Comparative Perspective," in *Unity and Diversity in the Gospels and John: Essays in Honor of Frank J. Matera* (eds. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 301–324 (314).

the whole world.[65] Jesus's loving and obedient attitude is also clearly present in the semeia-narratives where Jesus obeys his earthly mother (2:4), offers help even to those who lack faith (4:48), heals the sick men who are in a hopeless situation (5:1–18; 9), feeds the hungry (6:1–15), and shows strong emotions at Lazarus' tomb (11:33, 35). In conclusion, Karakolis argues that Jesus's signs do not only lead people to faith but Jesus's loving and obedient behaviour also challenges his disciples to follow his example.

Mira Stare defines the Johannine ethics as the ethics of life since the theme of *life* is heavily embedded throughout John's narratives. According to Stare, ζωὴ-vocabulary reaches its peak in John 6, which serves as a hermeneutical foundation for this particular aspect of John's Gospel. Reviewing the theme of life in John 6 reveals that life "comprises a complex link between the christological, theological, pneumatogical and soteriological dimensions of the reality of life."[66] According to Stare, John 6 evidently shows that life is available to every individual given that one comes into "a lasting relationship [with Jesus] that moves towards a mutual, lasting bond, to reciprocal immanence, and which is based on the unity and mutual bond between the Father and Jesus."[67] This relationship in Jesus further enables one to connect to God vertically and to other human beings horizontally. Stare shows how this life-ethic, especially towards other humans, is practically worked out in the Gospel through Jesus's footwashing in ch. 13, the parable of the vine[68] in ch. 15, and Jesus's prayer in ch. 17, and all these three passages have one thing in common—an ethics of response.[69] The disciples love each other in response to Jesus's love for them (John 13), abide in Jesus in response to Jesus's abiding in them, and finally carry the words of Jesus to the world in a hope of bringing nonbelievers to the knowledge of

65 Kok argues that John's implicit ethics should also include "the reality of a missional-incarnational ethos that will transcend all boundaries to show love and be accepting of everyone." Kobus Kok, "As the Father has sent me, I send you: Towards a missional-incarnational Ethos in John 4," *Moral Language*, 168–193 (196).

66 Mira Stare, "Ethics of Life in the Gospel of John," *John's Ethics*, 213–228 (220).

67 Stare, "Life," 221.

68 Chrys Caragounis proposes the new mode of relationship between Jesus and his followers by suggesting a new meaning for the words, ἄμπελος and κλήμα in ch. 15 as a 'vineyard' and 'vine' instead of 'vine' and 'branch'. Caragounis argues that the vine imagery does not refer to a relationship with the earthly Jesus, but it rather refers to "an active every day abiding and utter dependence on [the pneumatic] Christ that issues into fruit-bearing." See Chrys Caragounis, "'Abide in Me': The New Mode of Relationship between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15)," *John's Ethics*, 250–263 (260–261).

69 Similarly, Weyer-Menkhoff emphasises Jesus's faithful response to God. See Karl Weyer-Menkhoff, "The Response of Jesus: Ethics in John by Considering Scripture as Work of God," *John's Ethics*, 159–174.

Christ. Therefore, a belief in Jesus leads one to eternal life, which further leads to the character of response. In this sense John's ethics is not based on one's performance or activity but it arises from one's connection to Jesus and one's willingness to respond to Jesus's new commandment.

Another important work in this category comes from Karl Weyer-Menkhoff.[70] The primary aim of his work is to study John's ethics by investigating the semantic/linguistic field of various words that denote 'action'.[71] His main argument is largely divided in three parts. In the first part he examines 'the forms of action' by performing a detailed semantic analysis of ἔργον and ἐργάζεσθαι and how they are used in the ethical context, especially in relation to the attributive phrase τοῦ Θεοῦ.[72] He argues that the deeds that are considered ethical in John's Gospel must be done in and belong to God. Jesus is clearly the

70 Karl Weyer-Menkhoff, *Die Ethik des Johannesevangeliums im sprachlichen Feld des Handelns* (WUNT II/359; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

71 A similar work was published in 2017 by Alexander Drews who examines the semantics and ethical significance of ἔργον and ἐργάζεσθαι. After surveying the previous works on the use of ἔργον and laying down his own methodology, Drews begins his investigation of John's ethics by exploring how ἔργον is used and understood by Aristotle whose fundamental view of ἔργον is both similar to and different from the view that is postulated in John's Gospel. They are similar to each other in the sense that both writers emphasise the universal aspect of human endeavour to obtain the ultimate εὐδαιμονία but they are different in terms of the origin or nature of ἔργον. For Aristotle, all human beings have an innate desire to achieve εὐδαιμονία through virtuous works, whereas in John's Gospel such a goal is possible only through believing in the incarnate Jesus. Furthermore, Aristotle almost never uses ἔργον in a negative way, but John often connects ἔργον with negative nuances since works that are done in darkness and apart from God are condemned as evil in the Gospel. Drews also surveys the use of ἔργον and ἐργάζεσθαι in ancient texts using the linguistic methodology called corpus linguistics in order to put his enquiry of John's ethics in a broader context. Finally, Drews takes up a task of going throug all the passages that shed light on the use of ἔργον and draws its ethical implications in John's Gospel. The analysis of the use of ἔργον shows, for example, that not what one says, but what one does reveals one's true nature (Joh 3:18–21; 7:2–9; 8:37–47; 9:1–5; 15:22–24), and the deeds are often accompanied or stirred by emotions that lead to violence (Joh 5:16–20, 31–38; 6:26–30; 7:20–24; 8:37–47; 10:22–42). It is important to note that ἔργον is also used in soteriological, ecclesiological, and christological contexts, and the moral significance of ἔργον arises not on its own but through its connection with other linguistic signs. The dualism of light and darkness is especially important in setting the parameter of what is ethical in John's Gospel since John marks a sharp boundary between those who are in the darkness and those who are in the light. At the end, Drews persuasively argues that ἔργον should not be simply taken as a synonym of σημεῖον but as a term that opens up new horizons for John's ethics. Alexander Drews, *Semantik und Ethik des Wortfeldes »Ergon« im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT II/431; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

72 Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 71–122.

one who performed 'the works of God' through his complete obedience to his Father, and his disciples are also called to do the same by participating in the action of Jesus.

In the second part the author investigates 'the horizons of action' in which he emphasises that human actions in the Gospel do not take place in isolation but in the horizon of the Johannine narrative world, which is the world of the divine *Logos*. For example, σημεῖα in John's Gospel are exclusively reserved for Jesus and may not seem to carry ethical meanings for readers. The signs function, however, as a means of affirming Jesus as the anointed one of God, and thus the correct understanding of the reality brought by Jesus's σημεῖα is crucial in shaping one's behaviour.[73] Those who are transformed by such divine reality do not seek glory from people but rather seek God's approval like Jesus who finds the greatest glory at the cross.[74] Lastly, the author examines 'the modes of action' and highlights the fact that ethical deeds in the Johannine perspective can only be performed in the name of Jesus who also consistently acts only in the name of God.[75] As Jesus performs all of his deeds according to the will of the Father, the believers should also do likewise by following Jesus's example, which is ultimately evident in his love commandment. Weyer-Menkhoff helpfully demonstrates that John's ethics is not deficient but John is rather interested in providing more fundamental ethical qualities that are tied closely to one's faith in Jesus.

Finally, Bennema offers the most comprehensive and up-to-date study on the theme of mimesis and argues how mimesis is the foundational framework for Johannine ethics. Before moving on to investigate the use of mimesis in John's Gospel, Bennema distinguishes mimesis from both analogy and reciprocity. According to Bennema, mimesis is different from analogy for the following reasons: "1. mimesis is *intentional* as regards the imitator. … 2. it needs action from both persons involved. … 3. mimesis requires a *tangible* or *perceptible* act. … 4. the aim of mimesis is *ethical* or *moral transformation*."[76] Similarly, mimesis is also different from reciprocity because "1. person A upholds an example for person B to follow or emulate … [without] an exchange of goods or services. … 2. the movement is *unidirectional* or *linear*. … 3. the aim of Johannine mimesis is moral transformation … [without maintaining] social relations. …"[77] Bennema does not draw a strict semantic boundary between these

73 Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 125–183.
74 Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 170.
75 Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 185–214.
76 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 35–36 (italics original).
77 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 37–38 (italics original).

ideas, however, but admits that at times mimesis overlaps significantly with the notions of both analogy and reciprocity since John's concept of family assumes that "believers are to respond with the reciprocal actions of obedience, loyalty, love, testimony and so on."[78]

After highlighting the core features of mimesis, Bennema moves on to examines eight different linguistic constructions that form the Johannine mimetic language. The statistical analysis of John's mimetic expressions discloses that the Gospel uses a broad semantic domain to convey mimesis and is largely concerned with the two prominent categories of mimesis: divine mimesis and the believer-Jesus/God mimesis. As for divine mimesis, Bennema focuses primarily on the Son-Father mimesis, which becomes the paradigmatic and foundational for the believer-Jesus mimesis later on. Divine mimesis, according to Bennema, "is a vital mechanism for mediating the divine reality of the heavenly realm to the earthly one."[79] Next, Bennema explores the believer-Jesus mimesis by examining the conceptual traces of mimesis (following Jesus, remaining in Jesus, and filial mimesis), which may lack explicit mimetic connotations but nonetheless express implicit ethics conveyed by the verbs like ἀκολουθεῖν and μένειν. The most explicit, concrete example of the believer-Jesus mimesis, however, is found in Jesus's footwashing of his disciples in ch. 13. After a close examination of the pericope, Bennema argues that Jesus's footwashing is not a call for a literal replication of Jesus's footwashing but a creative embodiment of the underlying idea of the original act. According to Bennema, a Johannine mimetic process goes through the four stages: showing→ knowing→ doing→ being. In other words, sensory perception (observation) leads to cognitive perception (understanding) which further inspires individuals to creatively and concretely live out the ethical implications of the original act (doing) and consequently enjoy a state of blessedness (being).

Bennema divides a wide range of mimetic expressions largely into two basic types of mimesis: performative and existential mimesis. Performative mimesis refers to the imitation of concrete actions (e.g. loving one another, bearing fruit, purifying oneself, etc.), whereas existential mimesis points to the imitation of a particular state of being or existence (e.g. unity, being sent, being not of this world, etc.). Here both performative and existential mimeses help believers shape their identity and behaviour by embracing moral values or attributes that are in line with their new membership in the divine family. The believers' new identity is further confirmed and enhanced by their intimate, experiential rela-

78 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 39.
79 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 194.

tionship with Jesus (relational empowerment), by evoking personal event or episodic memory which helps believers recall Jesus's original act of footwashing or other moral examples and thus challenges them to behave in a similar manner (mnemonic empowerment), and finally by being enabled, reminded and taught by the Spirit (spiritual empowerment). In essence, "mimesis is rooted in and arises from a relationship with Jesus under the direction or guidance of the Spirit."[80] Bennema's thorough analysis of all mimetic occurrences in John's Gospel has brought mimesis to the centre stage of Johannine ethics and has persuasively affirmed that mimesis "is integral to Johannine ethics and finds expression within the context of the divine family … [and] that the believers' behaviour and identity in the divine family is modelled on that of the Father and Son."[81]

Reviewing the works in this category reveals that this particular approach has much potential in exploring John's ethics by understanding the ethical implications of John's vocabulary and phrases that have been mainly understood christo-theologically. What has been rather ignored in this approach, however, is the analysis of John's literary (rhetorical) practices that are instrumental in delineating John's ethics. The meaning or ethical values of these terms do not exist independently but arises out of narratives in which they are found. In other words, what is conveyed by a certain term is often determined by a larger storyline, which is coloured by various literary (rhetorical) techniques. Ignoring such an internal dynamic is in danger of generalising a term that may have different meanings in different contexts.

1.4 *A Genre-Sensitive Approach that Focuses on the Transformative Power of Rhetorical and Literary Devices of Narrative.*

In this last category, scholars examine John's ethics by taking the literary style of John's Gospel seriously as narrative. Those who take this particular approach believe in narrative potential in bringing about (moral) transformation among readers and providing interpretive devices through which readers construct their own personal and moral identities. For that reason, scholars in this category treat the various elements of narrative such as characters, plot, structure, setting, point of view, etc. not simply as a means of conveying information to readers but also as a means of engaging readers in moral formation since moral values are inherently but often implicitly embedded within narratives.

80 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 176.
81 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 201.

One of the most recent studies in this category comes from Lindsey Trozzo. She begins her study on Johannine ethics by exploring the genre of the Fourth Gospel, which is determinative of how a text engages the audience by establishing expectations or boundaries for meaning. After surveying various representative works on gospel genre, Trozzo concludes that the Fourth Gospel largely corresponds to the works in the category of *bios* in terms of narrative shape and style. Trozzo takes one step further, however, by recognising that genre is a flexible entity, which cannot be viewed simply in terms of a fixed and exhaustive classification. For that reason, Trozzo claims that the Fourth Gospel "participates in the *bios* genre to a significant degree while still exhibiting overlap with history, epic, or some other genre."[82] Having identified the genre of the Fourth Gospel, Trozzo investigates how this particular genre interacts with the audience in order to influence them especially in terms of moral efficacy. Among various ancient biographers, Trozzo finds Plutarch to be an ideal candidate for comparison since Plutarch not only writes his biographies in a narrative framework but also he writes primarily for the moral improvement of his readers.

To examine the moral efficacy of the Fourth Gospel, Trozzo argues that the author of the Gospel uses the encomiastic topics that are commonly found in ancient biographical texts. Trozzo divides Jesus's life into five parts in order to highlight virtuous actions or noble qualities of Jesus: origin; nurture and training; pursuits, deeds, and other external goods; death; events after death. What Trozzo finds at the end of this analysis is that the author portrays Jesus to be in possession of the exalted status, which qualifies Jesus to be in unity with the Father. The unity between Jesus and the Father becomes foundational for the unity between Jesus and his followers. Despite Jesus's elevated identity, Trozzo believes that the imitation of Jesus is not only possible but also encouraged since Jesus is presented throughout the Gospel as the ultimate example for both the followers and the audience to imitate. Such an engagement between Jesus and the audience can be possible "when the boundary between the audience and the story is dissolved."[83] In other words, through the metaleptic elements in the Gospel, the audience is invited into the narrative world where they are led to see their own life situations and deeds in light of the Gospel's standards. In fact, Trozzo applies the encomiastic topics to Jesus's followers and finds out that the followers not only share the same destiny with Jesus but their unity with Jesus also serves as the basis for family ethics that binds them in the same identity and actions.

82 Lindsey M. Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics: A Rhetorical Approach to Moral Efficacy in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 74–75.

83 Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 96.

Despite making some progress over the moral efficacy of the Fourth Gospel, an important question still remains: is the Johannine love sectarian? Before answering this question, Trozzo investigates two rhetorical structural devices, namely the prologue and the chain-link construction that are instrumental in interpreting the macro-level trajectory of the Gospel. The prologue reveals God's intention of restoring the broken relationship with the fallen humanity, whereas the chain-link construction at the end of ch. 12 discloses the universal scope of God's mission to the world. With these two interpretive guidelines, Trozzo examines the love command that has been considered sectarian by a large number of scholars. What Trozzo finds at the end is not exclusivity but God's inclusive mission to the world that is both spiritual and incarnational in nature.

Unlike Trozzo, who takes her interpretive framework from the ancient *bios*, Wagener bases his study on recent developments of narrative ethics.[84] Wagener begins his exploration of John's ethics by sharing the basic assumptions of narrative ethics that humans not only make sense of their world but also shape and evaluate their moral values and behaviours through stories. Having perceived the intrinsic ethical value of the narrative, Wagener focuses on the interplay between the reader and the narrative. For him, the reader is not simply a passive recipient of information but brings the narrative to life by actively engaging it with moral imagination, whereas the narrative is ethically charged to invite the reader to the narrative world to both widen and sharpen the reader's moral horizon.

What lies at the heart of this work is a narrative-ethical analysis of the selected characters whose variegated moral qualities function as to shape and challenge the reader's existing moral worldview. The reader is not to remain neutral but is encouraged to either identify or disidentify with characters by sharing their experiences and reflecting on the ethical dimensions of characters' actions. From this perspective, the reading process contributes to the formation of a narrative identity or more specifically an ethical identity since characters' actions and ethical viewpoints engage readers as to bring them to ethical reflection that ultimately leads to moral development. What this sort of moralizing signifies is that the reader is invited to perceive the narrative as an ethical field where each character offers a unique perspective and ethical position for the reader who is expected to observe behaviours and attitudes of

84 Fredrik Wagener, *Figuren als Handlungsmodelle: Simon Petrus, die samaritische Frau, Judas und Thomas als Zugänge zu einer narrativen Ethik des Johannesevangeliums* (WUNT II/408; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

characters in order to make ethical judgments that will concretely influence the reader's own moral reasoning.

Having laid down the theoretical foundation, Wagener selects four characters—Simon Peter, the Samaritan woman, Judas Iscariot, and Thomas—as test cases for his ethical analysis. Wagener examines his chosen characters in a seven-step process where he uses various narrative-ethical tools in order to uncover the ethical potential that these characters carry for the reader.[85] Wagener begins the analysis of these characters with a brief overview, which prepares the way for a detailed analysis of the scenes where each character appears. Wagener first establishes the narrative identity of the characters by analysing them as a literary entity of the narrated world and then their ethical identity by bringing out the characters' distinguishing traits or characteristics, which lead the reader into a more dynamic interaction with the narratives. Since ethos or morality is constituted by its ethical rules shared by a group of people, Wagener takes his analysis further by examining each character in its relationship to other individuals in John's Gospel. In the following section, Wagener explores the field of action that each character is involved in by grouping a character's actions according to the verbs that disclose his or her representative behaviours. Finally, Wagener examines the role that each character plays in the entire plot, especially in terms of engaging the reader in moral edification. Here emphasis is given to various ethical themes that are exemplified by each character and also to a question of whether these moral traits call for mimesis.

Wagener's detailed analysis reveals that his chosen characters display multifaceted virtues and/or vices for the reader to either embrace or reject. Wagener further shows how the reader's careful interaction with various characters leads to ethical reflections and behavioural changes beyond John's narrated world. At the end, Wagener connects his findings to other Johannine theological themes such as love, truth, life, relationship (community), and obedience, and concludes his work with the final exhortation: "Lerne mit Simon Petrus Schaf-Sein und Hirte-Werden, überwinde mit der samaritischen Frau Grenzen, versteh Judas oder verwirf Judas, aber reife an seinem Scheitern, mach dich mit Thomas auf den Weg in die Glaubensgemeinschaft! Und vielleicht entdeckst du nicht nur neue Seiten im Joh, sondern auch an dir."[86]

This particular methodological approach seems to be promising in terms of bringing out the overall ethical contour of John's Gospel and teasing out the

85 Wagener, *Figuren*, 201–216.
86 Wagener, *Figuren*, 574.

moral values that are often implicitly embedded within narratives or veiled by various literary devices. One of the advantages of this approach is that scholars take the entire Gospel as a unified whole, connecting the parts to a larger narrative scheme and examining rhetorical effects that different narrative devices have on the reader by paying a close attention to the text itself. These studies further elucidate how narratives help readers to form their personal identity, which is essential to the shaping of one's moral paradigm.

2 Conclusion

Having surveyed recent scholarship, we can now make some preliminary observations regarding the current state of John's ethics. With a crucial contribution made especially by the publication of *Rethinking the Ethics of John*, new areas for research have been proposed and investigated. Scholarly interest on John's ethics is, however, quite recent and just emerging that there is no consensus almost on every subject matter including the definition of 'ethics'.

The primary reason that makes the study of John's ethics difficult is that the author does not use the ethical language that is commonly found in other NT books, and most of the terms we find in the Gospel have been understood either theologically or christologically. The important task for us is then to revisit the Gospel in order to examine whether ethical values or implications can be drawn out from John's narratives that are heavily laden with Christotheological dimensions; some progress has been made in this regard as seen in the literature review but more work still needs to be done. Furthermore, there are no ethical chapters in the Gospel of John like the Sermon on the Mount or the paraenetic sections in Paul's letters but ethical elements are sparsely spread throughout the Gospel so that it seems almost impossible to have a single ethical idea that can capture John's overall moral paradigm. Thus it would be an important contribution to find the undergirding ethical dynamic that shapes John's moral structure. In order to prove that the Gospel of John indeed has ethical implications that are worthwhile to pursue, the next chapter will investigate further why John's Gospel has become so problematic in NTE and propose a way forward by laying a theoretical foundation for John's ethics.

CHAPTER 2

Exploring Ancient Moral Landscapes

As seen in the previous chapter, despite recent attention to John's ethics, it still has to overcome many hurdles and challenges in order to make its way into NTE as a major discussion partner. To achieve such a goal, our investigation of John's ethics has to be deep and wide enough to help us discover John's ethical framework. Thus instead of delving directly into John's texts, it is crucial to give enough attention to background issues first because ethics is not produced in a vacuum but rather is a product of its time and is formed through the endless interaction between various philosophical and moral ideas and also between social and religious norms of the day. The purpose of this chapter is to lay out some theoretical considerations in order to locate John's Gospel in the Greco-Roman context and to see how our understanding of ancient ethics can help us better grasp the overall framework of John's ethics.

1 Ethics in Greco-Roman Contexts

1.1 *Reconsidering the Boundaries of 'Ethics'*

Defining 'ethics' is a complicated task because 'ethics' in modern terminology carries numerous meanings, of which no one meaning can claim to be standard or representative. In fact, the reason for Meeks' denial of the presence of meaningful ethics in the Gospel of John is due to the fact that "the Fourth Gospel meets none of our expectations about the way ethics should be constructed." In other words, Meeks' negative evaluation of John's ethics is closely related to his conception of what ethics should be like. In Meeks' understanding of ethics, the ethical message of John's Gospel is neither relevant nor effective in terms of ethical formation, and what that shows is that setting a clear boundary of ethics is crucial in order not to underestimate or overestimate the value of John's ethics.

Ethics in general refers to a "systematic reflection upon the moral codes, values, principles, or norms used in any particular society."[1] However, when we focus on the phrase "systematic reflection," we encounter a serious problem in our search for ethics not just in the Gospel of John, but also in the New Tes-

1 van der Watt, "Preface," v–ix (v).

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tament in general since none of the NT books are written primarily for the purpose of the systematic investigation of human behaviour. That is why a scholar like Michael Wolter argues that 'ethos' is a more suitable term in the case of NTE since unlike ethics, ethos "designates a canon of institutionalized practices, which a given group regards as liable"[2] and "focuses on the behaviour of a group … functionally displaying their identity."[3] The definition of 'ethos' is certainly more apposite than that of 'ethics' since it mainly focuses on the identity or the characteristic spirit of a particular community. However, it is not clear how much more scholars can learn about NTE by simply employing the definition of 'ethos';[4] in fact, most of the scholarly works on NTE still utilise the term 'ethics' far more frequently than 'ethos'.

The more fundamental problem with the modern definition of ethics may lie possibly in the fact that scholars often draw too fine a line between 'religious' (philosophical)[5] and 'ethical' as to mean that the former refers to our behaviour towards God, and the latter refers to our behaviour towards other human beings. As the following discussion will show, such a clear dichotomy between 'religious' and 'ethical' was not found in the ancient world and thus may be attributed to a modern conception of ethics. To give us a lead in this regard, I refer to Morgan who lays out a general picture of the relationship between gods and ethics in the Greco-Roman world: "The gods are universally acknowledged as important in the [Greco-Roman] world of ethics. They are powerful and just. Numerous sayings tell us to honour, fear and follow the gods—so many that we should probably class honouring the gods as an ethic in its own right—and warn us that the gods punish impiety."[6] Here Morgan gives a general outlook of how a belief in a god played a substantial role in shaping average people's ethical mindset in the first century Greco-Roman world.[7]

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2 Michael Wolter, "Pauline Ethics according to 1 Corinthians," *Identity*, 199–217 (200).

3 van der Watt, "Preface," vii.

4 The fact that early Christian 'ethos' was still in the process of formation well into the 2nd century may be the reason scholars hesitate to use ethos instead of ethics. Jan Willem van Henten et al., "Introduction," in *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts* (eds. Jan Willem van Henten and Joseph Verheyden; STAR 17; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 7.

5 Though it is usually religions that are concerned with ethics in modern times, it was philosophical schools that were in charge of moral formation in ancient times.

6 Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 161.

7 Cf. Teresa Morgan, Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 496–498.

Morgan, in another article, argues that many writers of ancient fables and *gnomai* begin their writings with a notion of 'piety to the gods', which was a common opening topic, and such a beginning, according to Morgan, reflects "an order of ethical priorities."[8] In fact, humble and positive attitudes towards gods are of utmost importance in popular morality in the early Roman Empire, and the ideas of being friends with gods[9] and reflecting gods' images and characters are also well attested in 'wise men' collections (cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 1.6; 1.36; 1.60; 1.88; 1.90; 6.37; 6.51). What these examples suggest is that the writings that lead people to greater piety to gods or to imitate the characters of gods are considered ethical in the Greco-Roman world. It is true that the scope of Morgan's investigation is confined to the writings of popular morality in the early Roman Empire but such a concept of ethics is also well attested in the ancient philosophical writings as well.

One of the most well known moral philosophers from the ancient world is Aristotle whose influence is still being felt in modern moral philosophy.[10] The less well known, however, is the ethics of Plato, Aristotle's own teacher. According to Russell, Plato's ethics is less appreciated compared to that of Aristotle in modern studies of ethics probably due to the fact that Aristotle's ethics is more down-to-earth and practical,[11] whereas Plato's ethics is more mystical.[12] Due to this excessive influence of Aristotelian ethics in our modern moral thinking, we seem to have a much-skewed picture of ancient ethics as practical and human-centred in its moral instructions.[13] There is much evidence, however, that ancient philosophers thought of ethics not only necessarily as one's duties and behaviours towards other people but also towards gods. Plato in his

8 Teresa Morgan, "Encyclopaedias of Virtue?: Collections of Sayings and Stories about Wise Men in Greek," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (eds. Jason König and Greg Woolf; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108–128 (116).

9 It is interesting to note that despite being the Son of God, Jesus also treats his disciples as his friends in 15:12–17 and enjoins them to acts of friendship.

10 Anthony Kenny, "Introduction: The Aristotelian Tradition," in *Essays on the Aristotelian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–16 (1).

11 This is not to say that Aristotle's understanding of ethics was limited to the human realm. On the contrary, though somewhat ambivalent, Aristotle also thought of 'believing in and becoming like god' as ethical. See George H. van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (WUNT 232; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 136–138.

12 Daniel C. Russell, "Virtue as "Likeness to God" in Plato and Seneca," *JHP* 42 (2004): 241–260 (241).

13 James Fieser, *Moral Philosophy through the Ages* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001), 31, 40.

Theaetetus writes about Socrates' dialogue with his interlocutor who asks about how to make this world less evil, and Socrates answers as follows:

> But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore, we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to be righteous and holy and wise.
>
> PLATO, *Theaet*. 176 a–b

For Plato,[14] the highest virtue one could obtain in life is "likeness to God" by which Plato does not suggest that "we live the life of a god, but that we live the life that is the most godlike of those that are possible for us considered as human beings."[15] It is not just Plato who thought of "likeness to God" as the most important virtue one could pursue, but Seneca also made "likeness to God" the central and indispensable part of his ethics.

> But He in whose body virtue dwells, and spirit e'er present, is equal to the gods; mindful of his origin, he strives to return thither. No man does wrong in attempting to regain the heights from which he once came down. And why should you not believe that something of divinity exists in one who is a part of God? All this universe which encompasses us is one, and it is God; we are associates of God; we are his members. Our soul has capa-

14 See also *Phaedrus*, 246a–253c, 252c–253b; *Timaeus* 90c–d; *Republic* 613a; *Symposium* 212a; *Apology* 41c–d.

15 Russell, "Likeness to God," 249–250. According to Bennett, Plato's idea of "likeness to God" is most clearly explicated in the writings of Plotinus who was greatly influenced by the Platonic philosophy and has taken Plato's conception of "likeness to God" as the basis of any ethical discussion: "And it is right to say that the Soul's becoming something good and beautiful is its being made like to God, because from Him come Beauty and all else which falls to the lot of real beings. … You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty" (Plotinus, *Enn*. 1.6.6; 1.6.9). Bennett concludes by noting that Plotinus and Plato agree at least on this point, that is, "'becoming like God as much as possible' is a goal for this life, and has significance not merely for the sages or mystic, but for every ethical human being who seeks to live life to its greatest capacity." Foster Bennett, "Γενέσθω θεοειδής πᾶς: Likeness to God in Plotinus and Plato," *Sophia* 14 (2011): 1–17 (16). Cf. D. Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in *Plato 2. Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (ed. G. Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 309–328.

> bilities, and is carried thither, if vices do not hold it down. Just as it is the nature of our bodies to stand erect and look upward to the sky, so the soul, which may reach out as far as it will, was framed by nature to this end, that it should desire equality with the gods.
>
> SENECA, *Ep*. 92. 30

Seneca's understanding of ethics, however, even goes further than that of Plato and sounds not much different from NTE in general.

> God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. Can one rise superior to fortune unless God helps him to rise? … If you see a man who is unterrified in the midst of dangers, untouched by desires, happy in adversity, peaceful amid the storm, who looks down upon men from a higher plane, and views the gods on a footing of equality, will not a feeling of reverence for him steal over you, will you not say: "This quality is too great and too lofty to be regarded as resembling this petty body in which it dwells? A divine power has descended upon that man."
>
> SENECA, *Ep*. 41.1–4

For Seneca, being ethical is not ultimately possible without the aid of the divine; humans are too weak to pursue goodness without the power of an indwelling holy spirit.[16] Though Seneca's understanding of a spirit is different from that found in John's Gospel, Seneca nonetheless acknowledges that it is a god who helps people grow morally through a gift of rationality. In a similar manner, Epictetus also promotes faith in the benevolent gods and encourages his readers to imitate the gods.[17]

> Now the philosophers say that the first thing we must learn is this: That there is a God, and that He provides for the universe, and that it is impossible for a man to conceal from Him, not merely his actions, but even his purposes and his thoughts. Next we must learn what the gods are like;

16 James Ware, "Moral Progress and Divine Power in Seneca and Paul," *Moral Progress*, 267–283.

17 Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, "ΠΙστις and Fides as Civic and Divine Virtues: A Pauline Concept Through Greco-Roman Eyes," in *Paul's Graeco-Roman Context* (ed. C. Breytenbach; BETL, 277; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 541–559 (552).

> for whatever their character is discovered to be, the man who is going to please and obey them must endeavor as best he can to resemble them.
>
> EPICTETUS, *Diatr*. 2.14.11–12

Finally, though not advocating the notion of imitating gods like the previous philosophers, Cicero in the beginning of his book, *De natura deorum*, underlines the importance of being faithful and paying piety towards gods and taking seriously the role of religion in moral formation.[18]

> And when these [piety, reverence, religion] are gone, life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion; and in all probability the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of all the virtues.
>
> CICERO, *Nat. d.* 1.3–4

Cicero here argues that the lack of piety and faith towards the gods results in the moral deterioration of human society and thus ultimately of justice. The notion of imitating gods is not, however, only a Greco-Roman virtue but is also attested in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, most predominantly in the writings of Philo.

> A man should imitate God as much as may be and leave nothing undone that may promote such assimilation as is possible.
>
> *Virtues*. 168

> [T]o imitate God's works is a pious act.
>
> *Leg*. 1. 48

> What greater good can there be than that they should imitate God?
>
> *Spec*. 4.73

The fact that the notion of imitating God appears primarily in Jewish literature written during the Hellenistic period may signify that a Jewish writer like Philo was considerably influenced by Greco-Roman philosophy.[19]

18 Sierksma-Agteres, "Πιστις," 550.

19 The imitation of God is not mentioned in the writings of Josephus.

What this brief analysis of these ancient texts shows is that the ancient people thought of gods not simply as the object of worship but also as the channel through which people become morally reliable. In fact, 'imitating or believing in gods' is an important aspect of ancient ethics, which provides people with "a radically transformed set of priorities with which one engages the world."[20] Therefore, the modern conception of ethics, which deals with conduct only within human relationships, must be reassessed in light of the evidence presented above.

2 Searching for an Ethical Model

What the previous discussion signifies is that the modern conception of ethics is not suitable for analysing John's ethics because the author of John's Gospel lived in the world where people had a different ethical framework from that of the moderns. Then we have a better chance of finding a fitting ethical model for our study not in modern moral philosophy but in the ethical landscape of the first century Mediterranean world because the author would have likely presented his ethical ideas in a way that made sense to first-century readers. It is widely recognised that the author[21] of John's Gospel lived in the Hellenised world of the Roman Empire where no one was outside the influence of Greco-Roman culture and philosophy.[22] Though we need to be careful not to give the impression that there was somehow a linear relationship between ancient philosophical ethics and New Testament writings, it is highly likely that someone like John, who was a sophisticated writer, would have been familiar with Greek literature and philosophy. In fact, there is much evidence that Hellenism was the major intellectual power even in Jewish Palestine before the time of Jesus.[23] If the infiltration of Hellenistic philosophy and culture in the first cen-

20 Russell, "Likeness to God," 260.

21 The question of authorship and the provenance of the Gospel is still hotly debated and for our purpose, it is enough to recognise that the Gospel of John was written in the first century in a place where the influence of Greco–Roman culture and philosophy was dominant.

22 Hengel similarly argues that from "about the middle of the third century BC all Judaism must really be designated 'Hellenistic Judaism' in the strict sense." Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; London: SCM, 1974), 1:104. Cf. Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (HCS 30; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xiv.

23 Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, 1:104.

tury Mediterranean world was as extensive as research suggests, we are drawn to the possibility that even though John's overall message is Christo-centric, the literary framework in which the author writes would have been influenced and shaped by the particular age in which he lived.

There are many ethical models available in the first century Mediterranean world from the various ancient philosophical schools such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, Scepticism, etc., and the reason for such increasing interest in ethical theories in the first century is succinctly explained by Vining:[24]

> By the first century, when the writings of the NT were being composed, attention to the branches of philosophy known as logic and physics had diminished in the Hellenistic world but ethical interest was flourishing. The age in which Christianity first made its appeal was also an age in which the ethical consciousness of philosophers had been aroused.

Though all of these ancient ethical theories were interconnected to each other one way or the other and are responsible for shaping the worldview of the ancients, we must choose one suitable model on which we can further our understanding of John's ethics. Some of theoretical ethical models do not aptly fit the Gospel of John since they tend to articulate their ethical reasoning through a theoretical account of human motives and actions, whereas the Gospel of John primarily expresses its ethical ideas through characters in stories, not in abstract and theoretical ways.

As seen previously, it is crucial to realise that ancient ethical teachings were not confined to a systematic evaluation of human behaviours or motives such as Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Contrary to such a popular opinion, Betz argues that there were various levels of ethics in the Greco-Roman world, which included 'popular morality', which refers to "apparently unsystematic collections of moral principles which are shaped by particular communities."[25] Furthermore, materials from social customs and religious rituals also assumed "the status of ethical principle."[26] Due to this multifaceted nature of ancient ethics, "Greco-Roman and early Christian ethics should not be approached with narrow definitions, but rather with the broad picture of the phenomena in mind."[27]

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24 Peggy A. Vining, *Galatians and First-Century Ethical Theory* (PhD diss.: The Catholic University of America, 2008), 2.

25 Hans Dieter Betz, "Introduction," in *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz; SCHNT 4; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 1–10 (2).

26 Betz, "Introduction," 2.

27 Betz, "Introduction," 3.

In fact, the modern scholarly tendency to analyse NTE especially in light of the more advanced ancient ethical theories has made us believe that there is no meaningful, worthwhile ethics in the Gospel of John since it does not give a theoretical account of 'right' and 'wrong'.

It is no surprise then that many works on NTE tend to investigate only those texts that specifically deal with explicit rules of conduct. For example, scholars have drawn Matthean ethics primarily from the Sermon on the Mount, and Pauline scholars have formulated Pauline ethics mainly in the framework of 'indicative' and 'imperative' from passages like Rom 12–15, Gal 5–6, Phil 4, 1Thess 4–5, and Col 3–4. However, most Pauline scholars now agree that it is almost impossible to separate Paul's ethics from his theological structure[28] because "the Pauline imperative is not just the result of the indicative but fully integral to it."[29] In other words, one does not do justice to Paul's ethics by investigating only seemingly paraenetic texts,[30] but one must explore ethics by probing its interrelationship with different aspects of Paul's theology. This is even truer in the case of John's Gospel because John's heavy emphasis on Christology often gives readers an impression that there is nothing but Christology in John's Gospel.[31] We must not then limit our investigation of John's ethics

28 Brian S. Rosner, "Paul's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (ed. James D.G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 212–224 (216–217).

29 Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 226.; Cf. Michael Parsons, "Being Procedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing," in *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (ed. Brian S. Rosner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 217–247.

30 Jörg Frey argues that "the search for ethics in the New Testament not only includes explicit exhortations as given in the "ethical" sections of the New Testament Epistles, but also the elements of group ethos as reflected in the narrative of the Gospels, in the metaphors and imaginative worlds, and in the implicit values and norms." Jörg Frey, "'Ethical' Traditions, Family Ethos, and Love in the Johannine Literature," *Ethics*, 168–169.

31 Wiard Popkes makes an important point regarding how to find paraenetic texts in the New Testament: "The implications of the observation that paraenesis does not denote a literary genre are far-reaching; there are no "paraenetic texts" as such, rather, we simply must ask from case to case whether a given text serves paraenetic *purposes*." See Wiard Popkes, "Paraenesis in the New Testament: An Exercise in Conceptuality," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (eds. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 13–46 (15). Wannenwetsch also express a similar concern about modern biases against ethics. Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Political Love: Why John's Gospel is not as Barren for Contemporary Ethics as it Might Appear," in *You have the Words of Eternal Life: Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective* (ed. Kenneth Mtata; Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2012), 93–105 (94).

to those passages that talk about certain rules of conduct since it would be a huge misunderstanding on our part to assume that a theoretical ethics was the only kind of ethics or the most dominant form of ethics in the Greco-Roman world.

Recently some classicists[32] have begun to voice the importance of 'popular morality' in understanding ethics in the Greco-Roman world and have persuasively claimed that scholars must examine the non-philosophical literature such as tragedy, comedy, *gnomai*, proverb, fable, exempla, etc. in order to paint a balanced picture of ancient ethics. As for popular morality in the Greco-Roman world, Morgan gives a very insightful evaluation, which deserves to be quoted at length.[33]

> It is increasingly understood that philosophers of the early [Roman] Empire did not see themselves primarily as exponents of systems. They saw themselves in much more organic, biographical terms: as followers of an inspirational teacher (who might be dead or alive); as guardians of a tradition; as trying to live a certain kind of life. … Lives, more than doctrines, were what inspired seekers after wisdom. It was almost as if, with the virtual collapse of the Athenian schools, the history of philosophy has itself come to an end. The task now was to interpret and understand it, rather than to move it forward.

If Morgan's evaluation is correct, we can assume with some confidence that a paradigm shift has been slowly made from doctrine to biography in terms of the ethical landscape at the time of primitive Christianity. Then the fact that the Gospel of John is written primarily as a grand narrative about Jesus and his interaction with other characters hints that we should probably seek an ethical model that shares a similar literary style and ethical approach with that of John's Gospel, and this evaluation leaves us with one obvious option, namely *ancient biography*.[34]

As previously seen, there had been a gradual transition in the early Roman empire from the theoretical understanding of ethics to biographical ap-

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32 See esp. K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Morgan, *Popular Morality*.

33 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 274–275.

34 It is important to note that biography may have been elite in origin but it gained popularity among ordinary people due to its practical value and also by making its way into proverbs and *gnomai*, which later became accessible to the wider public. See Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 6.

roaches to ethics, and biography is the most ideal form of literature that bridges the gulf between philosophical ethical theory and popular morality.[35] Despite some scholarly objections against John's Gospel as ancient biography, they nonetheless share affinities in terms of literary style: both writings (i) are written in prose narrative; (ii) focus on the words and the deeds of a main character; (iii) portray characters in a way as to steer the readers' response in a particular direction.[36] This study will attempt to show that the similarity between the Gospel of John as narrative about Jesus and ancient biography as narrative about noble characters also share in terms of how they shape their readers' moral worldview.[37]

2.1 *Plutarch*

Among many ancient biographers,[38] this study will focus primarily on Plutarch not only because he was a contemporary of the author of John's Gospel but also because he was a key figure in the development between Platonism and Neoplatonism[39] during which an increasing interest in ethical discourse was clearly witnessed. Plutarch is especially important because he was one of the few[40]

35 Betz, "Introduction," 6.

36 Talbert in his review of Burridge's *What Are the Gospels?* asserts that "this volume ought to end any legitimate denials of the canonical Gospels' biographical character." Charles H. Talbert, "Review of Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*," *JBL* 112 (1993): 714–715 (715). For a thorough analysis of John's Gospel as ancient biography, see Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (2ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 213–232. Attridge, on the other hand, argues that the literary genre of John's Gospel is "generically quite diverse, with parallels to a wide range of literary patterns and generic forms." Harold W. Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Gospel," *JBL* 121 (2002): 3–21.

37 Modern literary critics also emphasise that narrative is an integral part of human cognition and existence and thus can also be relevant and functional in shaping one's moral life. See Adam Z. Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). See also Wagener, *Figuren*, 6–47 for a helpful discussion on narrative ethics.

38 Some of the well-known ancient biographal texts include: Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Arrian's *Discourses of Epictetus*, Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Isocrates's *Evagoras*, Philo's *Life of Moses*, Tacitus's *Agricola*, Lucian's *Demonax*, Philodemus's *Life of Epicurus*, Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, Isocrates's *Busiris*, Nicolaus of Damascus's *Life of Augustus*, Satyrus's *Euripides*, Nepos's *Atticus*.

39 Betz, "Introduction," 5.

40 Philo also writes his biography for the moral formation of his readers: "These are such men as lived good and blameless lives, whose virtues stand permanently recorded in the most Holy Scriptures, not merely to sound their praises, but to urge on the readers (ὑπὲρ τοῦ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας προτρέψασθαι) and induce them to aspire to the same (ἐπὶ τὸν ὅμοιον ζῆλον ἀγαγεῖν); for in these men we have laws endowed with life and reason" (*Abr.* 1.4–5). For a helpful comparison between Plutarch and Philo, see Maren R. Niehoff, "Philo and Plutarch

who deliberately wrote his biographies and other writings for the purpose of moral formation as seen below:[41]

> I began the writing of my "Lives" for the sake of others, but I find that I am continuing the work and delighting in it now for my own sake also, using history as a mirror and endeavoring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted. For the result is like nothing else than daily living and associating together, when I receive and welcome each subject of my history in turn as my guest, so to speak, and observe carefully "how large he was and of what mien," and select from his career what is most important and most beautiful to know. "And oh! what greater joy than this canst thou obtain," and more efficacious for moral improvement?
>
> PLUTARCH, *Tim.* 1–2

Plutarch's aim[42] for his writing was then not simply to leave the biographical accounts of particular historical figures but "to provide models (παράδειγμα) from history to his contemporaries … to evoke their lives anew, as *Lives*, for moral improvement."[43] Unlike historians who write about historical figures for political reasons (though historians had not ignored the moral elements altogether),[44] Plutarch as a biographer writes biography "which allows [people] to grasp, through the reconstruction of the human qualities of history's protagonists, what is still truly alive of the past."[45] In other words, Plutarch never meant to give an abstract, theoretical account of ethics but rather he aimed at provid-

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as Biographers: Parallel Responses to Roman Stoicism," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 52 (2012): 361–392.

41 It was Isocrates, who first began to write for moral formation in prose; before him most of the encomia had been written by poets. Thus it is likely that the Greco-Roman biographical tradition may have been shaped initially by Isocrates' writings. Charles W. Hedrick, "Imitating Virtue and Avoiding Vice: Ethical Functions of Biography, History, and Philosophy," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought* (ed. Ryan K. Balot; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 421–439 (421–422).

42 Stadter suggests that Cicero's writings may have influenced Plutarch to write his biographies. Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 217–218.

43 Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 273.

44 Hedrick, "Imitating Virtue," 432.

45 Paolo Desideri, *"Non scriviamo storie, ma vite* (Plu., *Alex*. 1.2): La Formula biografica di Plutarco," in *Testis temporum. Aspetti e problemi della storiografia antica, Pavia, 16 marzo 1995* (Como: Edzioni New Press, 1995), as cited in Hägg, *Biography*, 273.

ing life examples through biographical narrative, which could provoke sincere desires among readers to imitate virtues modeled by Plutarch's heroes.[46] In fact, "the ethical effectiveness of narrative was widely acknowledged by the ancients … [due to] its formal similarity to the lived experience of exemplarity … [and] has a more basic part to play in the moral formation of people's characters than does philosophy."[47]

Plutarch in *Pericles and Fabius Maximus* gives further insight as to how readers should read his biographical texts. Plutarch distinguishes physical senses (αἴσθησις) from the intellect (νοῦς) in that the former must receive every physical stimulus which strikes them, whereas the latter has the ability to choose what is really good and best and turn away from what is unhelpful. Plutarch goes on to argue that as colour stimulates and nourishes our physical vision, we must apply our rational faculty (διάνοια) to such objects that "invite it onward to its own proper good" (*Per*. 1.3). Such a process of observing and identifying what is good and noble, according to Plutarch, must be used when one reads his biographies. In fact, Plutarch does not want his readers to read his biographies for the purpose of sheer pleasure but to discover and imitate the virtues that lead them away from evil to good: "Such objects are to be found in virtuous deeds; these implant in those who search them out a great and zealous eagerness which lead to imitation" (*Per* 1.4). Plutarch, however, also emphasises that virtuous acts are not only seen in his biographies but also in everyday life and that one has to be intellectually alert to recognise virtuous deeds whenever

46 It is not only Plutarch who emphasised the importance of mimesis in moral formation; Seneca, for example, says, "Nothing is more successful in bring honourable influences to bear upon the mind or in straightening out the wavering spirit that is prone to evil, than association with good men. For the frequent seeing, the frequent hearing of them little by little sinks into the heart and acquires the force of precepts" (Seneca, *Ep*. 94.40); similarly, Philo also writes, "These are such men as lived good and blameless lives, whose virtues stand permanently recorded in the most holy scriptures, not merely to sound their praises but for the instruction of the reader and as an inducement to him to aspire to the same; for in these men we have laws endowed with life and reason" (Philo, *Abr*. 1.4–5) and many others (Quintilian, *Inst*. 12.2.29; Pliny, *Ep*. 8.13; *4 Macc*. 9:19–25; *T. Benj*. 3.1–2; 4.1–3; Exod 20:10–11; Lev 19:2; Deut 10:18–19; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; Phil 3:17, 4:9; 2 Thess 3:7, 9; Heb 6:12, 13:7; 3 John 11).

47 Hedrick, "Imitating Virtue," 436. Furthermore, modern psychologists and neurologists also have discovered the similar results regarding the transforming power of narrative. See Kay Young et al., "The Neurology of Narrative," *SubStance* 30 (2001): 72–84; Jens Brockmeier, "Narrative Scenarios: Toward a Culturally Thick Notion of Narrative," in *The Oxford Handbook of Culture of Psychology* (ed. Jaan Valsiner; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 440–467; Raymond A. Mar and Keith Oatley, "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience," *PPS* 3 (2008): 173–192.

they occur. Therefore, Plutarch through his writings wants to help his readers make correct moral choices and thus become mature and unswerving in their character.

Plutarch did not write only about the lives of virtuous men, however, but also of evil men whose life examples must be avoided. In *Demetrius and Antony* Plutarch writes of two figures, Demetrius Poliocetes and Mark Antony, who do not seem to belong to the list of Plutarch's heroes. Despite these men's failure and mistakes in their career and lives, Plutarch thinks that it is still important for him to let readers know not only what is good, just and useful but also what is harmful, shameful, and unjust (*Demetr*. 1.3). As a physician needs to know about different diseases and an expert in harmony needs to recognise the nature of discord, whoever wants to live a virtuous life must also be aware of the evil that is present in the world (*Demetr*. 1.5–6). In other words, Plutarch's chosen protagonists should not be viewed in a strictly black and white manner. No one is perfectly good or bad in Plutarch's mind—even noble men can make horrible mistakes and fail to perform virtuous deeds. Thus "imitation is no wholesale affair directed towards any one particular model *in toto*, but towards individual acts of virtue, while the manifestation of vice serve as deterrents."[48] These are some of the basic ethical dimensions of Plutarch's rhetoric that will be relevant and helpful for our investigation of John's ethics.

2.2 *Compatibility between John and Plutarch*

One of the benefits of comparing John's Gospel with the writings of Plutarch is that one can avoid the trap of circular reasoning by bringing in evidence from outside the Gospel and thus examine John's ethics in light of what was considered ethical in the first century. A classicist, Charles Hedrick has rightly pointed out the reason why many modern readers fail to see the ethical implications of ancient narratives.

> In the Greco-Roman tradition, at least from the fourth century BC on, history[49] was regarded as a form of ethical teaching (askēsis). This attitude should be understood as underpinning traditional historical narratives even where it is not explicitly avowed. Historians fostered a nuanced sense of their culture's standards of right and wrong not by expounding philosophical rules but by presenting examples, from which readers

48 Hägg, *Biography*, 276.

49 Hedrick does not make a clear distinction between historical and biographical narratives. Hedrick, "Imitating Virtue," 436.

> abstracted the nature of virtue and vice. It can be difficult for moderns to understand the ethical dimension of ancient historiography, because it presumes an ethically absolute vision of the past. Ethics were decisively displaced from historiography and from modern understanding generally with the rise and spread of German historicism in the course of the nineteenth century.[50]

As seen above, modern readers "lack instinctive understanding of moralism which previous generations enjoyed"[51] and thus have difficulty recognising ethical insights from biographical narratives since they are used to acquiring ethical instructions through "a rule based morality."[52] Similarly, John's ethics would not be easily recognised by readers if they are not equipped with relevant skills to read biographical texts for ethical purposes. Thus having Plutarch's writings as a reference text can give us the benefit of studying John's Gospel "as literature in context"[53] and thus examining John's ethics in light of its contemporary ethical landscape.

An objection may be raised in making such comparisons, since Plutarch writes mainly "for the upper class in a high linguistic register (Hochliteratur) whereas [the author of John's Gospel] seems to belong to the lower class who writes in a correspondingly lower linguistic register (Kleinliteratur)."[54] Thus the question of propriety in using Plutarch's writings needs to be addressed before going into a comparison between the two. The crucial question that we must ask is this; was there a rigid socio-economic boundary between elite and non-elite to the extent that they had different moral outlooks?

Justin Meggitt strongly argues that there was a distinct culture for the elites that was not readily available to the non-elites to which most early Christians would have belonged. Consequently, according to Meggitt, NT scholars should no longer rely on the elite literary sources in order to understand the social background of early Christianity.[55] Meggitt's methodology, which assumes early Christians to be primarily from a low socio-economic class, has

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50 Hedrick, "Imitating Virtue," 428.

51 C.B.R. Pelling, "The Moralism of Plutarch's *Lives*," in *Plutarch and History* (London: The Classical Press of Wales, 1995), 237–251 (238).

52 Stadter, *Roman Readers*, 241.

53 Hägg, *Biography*, 155.

54 This quotation is taken from the abstract of a paper given by David Aune, "Why Compare Plutarch and the New Testament?: The Form, Function and Limitations of Greco-Roman Parallel Collections" (paper presented for the Program Unit of *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti* at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, San Diego, Nov. 2014).

55 Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 19.

been effectively criticised by Dale Martin who insists that applying such simplistic binary categories (elite and non elite) is "a step backward rather than forward."[56] Martin continues that "most scholars have argued that more (not less) nuanced analysis of ancient class and status is necessary if we are to make sense of the variety of data related to social conflict reflected in the sources."[57] In fact, recent studies have shown persuasively that even though the Gospel writers did not write primarily for an elite audience, they certainly had access to or were even possibly trained in the rhetoric of Mediterranean antiquity.[58] Furthermore, the fact that the culture of Greco-Roman society in the first century was largely oral and public may indicate that both groups of elite and non-elite would have shared many aspects of cultural life "even if its literary crystallizations should in fact be shown to have had a restricted circulation."[59]

In terms of morality in the Greco-Roman world, Morgan states that there is a greater overlap between high philosophy and popular morality if the focus is shifted from doctrine to biography.[60] Morgan suggests four ancient writers (Seneca, Plutarch, Maximus and Epictetus) who not only belonged to a particular philosophical school but also borrowed ideas from the wider culture. Among these four, Plutarch "incorporates more popular sayings and stories, in every kind of essay, than any other author of the earlier empire."[61] Though it is not clear why biography became so popular in late Hellenistic philosophy, Morgan believes that "it is at least possible that popular culture influenced the change."[62] Like language, it is imperative for any society to have ethics that is shared by both elite and non-elite in order to keep people together. Thus "high philosophy begins, at least, by depending on popular ideas, and when ideas

56 Dale B. Martin, "Review Essay: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 51–64 (54).

57 Martin, "Review," 54.

58 For the comprehensive analysis of John's Gospel in light of ancient rhetorical practices, see Alicia D. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus; A Rhetorical Analysis on the Fourth Gospel's Use of Scripture in its Presentation of Jesus* (London: T&T Clark International 2012). See also Vernon K. Robbins, "Writing as a Rhetorical Act in Plutarch and the Gospels," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetori in Hounor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. Duane F. Watson; JSNTSup 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 142–168.

59 F. Gerald Downing, "A Bas Les Aristos. The Relevance of Higher Literature for the Understanding of the Earliest Christian Writings," *NovT* 30 (1988): 212–230 (216).

60 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 276. Betz also similarly argues that "simple folk-wisdom can be elevated to the highest philosophical level. Conversely, highly original creations of philosophical thought can be popularised and even become part of the accepted, everyday morality." Betz, "Introduction," 3.

61 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 290.

62 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 298.

appear in popular ethical texts which could come from either tradition, it is *rarely* safe to assume that they originated in high philosophy."[63]

3 Moral Progress

3.1 *Conversion as a Beginning of Moral Progress*

So far this chapter has shown that ancient narrative has ethical purposes, and imitating virtues of noble figures was one of the major ways of improving an individual's ethical capacity. There is still another important aspect of Plutarch's ethical principles that needs to be addressed, namely, 'moral progress', which basically refers to the process of gradually advancing to virtue while removing vice. Since Plutarch's concept of moral progress was "a part of the larger Hellenistic moral philosophical context,"[64] it is crucial to have a wider understanding of the dynamics of moral progress in the ancient world.[65] Unlike the modern tendency to think of moral progress as an individual business, the ancients believed in the central role of philosophy[66] and religion[67] in one's moral progress. Religion and philosophy are often considered in modern thinking to be stumbling blocks for each other but such a paradox did not exist in the ancient world.[68] On the contrary, philosophy and religion were so intrinsically intertwined for the ancients that it was impossible to think of one without the other.[69] Seneca argues that philosophy and religion always go hand in hand.

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63 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 299.

64 Richard A. Wright, "Plutarch on Moral Progress," in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald; New York: Routledge, 2008), 136–150 (146).

65 Though the notion of moral progress predominantly belongs to Greco-Roman philosophy, Philo appears to be familar with the Stoic doctrine of moral progress, and such awareness is evident in his philosophical interpretation of Scripture where he portrays Abraham and Jacob as those who finally attain virtue. Geert Roskam, *On the Path to Virtue: The Stoic Doctrine of Moral Progress and its Reception in* (*Middle-*)*Platonism* (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy 33; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 173–185.

66 Virtually every kind of ancient philosophy "involves ethics in its marrow [since] the highest task of education is the moulding of men to the pattern of true αρετή." Stephen Charles Mott, "Greek Ethics and Christian Conversion: The Philonic Background of Titus II 10–14 and III 3–7," *NovT* 20 (1978): 22–48 (31).

67 Though the term 'religion' is used for the sake of convenience, I acknowledge the significant gap between the ancient understanding of religion and that of the modern. See N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1:246–278 for a helpful discussion of religion in the Greco-Roman world.

68 Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New Jersey: Paulist, 1997), 78.

69 Hirsch-Luipold persuasively argues that religion and philosophy were inseparable in the

> What would there be in philosophy worthy of your respect, if she were a thing that came by bounty? Her sole function is to discover the truth about things divine and things human. From her side religion never departs, nor duty, nor justice, nor any of the whole company of virtues which cling together in close-united fellowship. Philosophy has taught us to worship that which is divine, to love that which is human; she has told us that with the gods lie dominion, and among men, fellowship.
>
> SENECA, *Ep.* 90. 3

Such a heavy dependence on religion and philosophy in moral formation assumed that one should belong to either a religious or philosophical group in order to make moral progress in one's life, though one could be associated with more than one particular guild.[70] Depending on to which philosophical schools or religious sects one belonged, one's understanding of how moral progress is achieved differed, and the process of transferring one's allegiance and thus membership to another group is called 'conversion'.[71] Not all philosophical schools or religions required the same level of commitment and allegiance in the process of conversion; philosophical schools and prophetic[72] religions usually demanded a higher level of commitment and allegiance due to their emphasis on moral formation,[73] whereas non-prophetic religion such as civic religions or mystery cults "did not involve the taking of a new way of life in

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Greco-Roman world, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, "Der eine Gott bei Philon von Alexandrien und Plutarch," in *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch: Götterbilder—Gottesbilder—Weltbilder* (ed. Rainer Hirsch-Luipold; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 141–168 (161–167).

70 According to Morgan, ordinary people in the Greco-Roman world also formed an ethical group with those who shared the similar understanding of 'right' and 'wrong': "To some degree, user-group of each saying or story must have been self-identifying, consisting of those who wanted to belong and/or saw each other as belonging together in a particular context. An 'ethical group', then, consisted of those who recognised a piece of wisdom as authoritative at a given moment. … Most groups, however, will have overlapped extensively with many others, and it is this which allows us to talk in general terms of a widespread … ethical community in the early Empire." Morgan, *Popular Morality*, 213.

71 Though 'conversion' is a modern term, it is still the most fitting word in modern parlance to describe such a phenomenon.

72 I think the categories such as 'prophetic' and 'non-prophetic' may be too rigid and out of date but they are used here due to the implications these terms carry for our purpose.

73 See J. De Waal Dryden, *Theology and Ethics in 1Peter* (WUNT II/209; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 91. See also Steve Mason, "*PHILOSOPHAI*: Graeco-Roman, Judean and Christian," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996), 31–58.

place of the old."[74] Early Christianity,[75] being one of the prophetic religions along with Judaism, required "the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved that the old was wrong and the new is right."[76]

According to Finn, conversion had different meanings to different groups: "For Plato, its purpose was to turn the soul around (*epistrophe*); for Cicero, to turn people from carelessness to piety (*conversio*); for Seneca, to discover the truth about things divine and human (*verum invenire*); for the author of the *Poimandres*, to summon to repentance those who follow the path of error and ignorance (*metanoia*)."[77] It was Philo, however, who gave the most dramatic description of conversion in relation to moral progress and likens the process of conversion to aborting a child of vice and bearing a child of virtue:

> For when soul is "many," full that is of passions and vices with her children, pleasure, desires, folly, incontinence, injustice (ηδονών, επιθυμιών, αφροσύνης, ακολασίας, αδικίας), gathered around her, she is feeble and sick and dangerously near to death … [after conversion] then receiving the divine seed she moulds it into shape and brings forth new life in forms of precious quality and marvelous loveliness, wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, holiness, piety and the other virtues and good emotions.
>
> PHILO, *Praem.* 159–160

Despite different understandings of 'conversion', the ancients at least agree on one aspect of conversion, that is, the new is better than the old.[78] If not, there was no point for anyone to take risks by leaving behind what is familiar and convenient.

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74 A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), 7.

75 Some argue that early Christianity was viewed as a philosophical school, not as religion. George H. van Kooten, "Is Early Christianity a Religion or a Philosophy? Reflections on the Importance of 'Knowledge' and 'Truth' in the Letters of Paul and Peter," in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (eds. Jitse Dijkstra, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 393–408.

76 See Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

77 Finn, *Rebirth*, 85 citing from Nock, *Conversion*, 179–180.

78 Nock, *Conversion*, 7. In modern thinking we tend to attribute the experience of conversion only to religion but such was not the case in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, true conversion to philosophy accompanies the reorientation of life that is typical of Christian conversion. Seneca writes, "I feel, my dear Lucilius, that I am being not only reformed, but

3.2 *How Moral Progress is Achieved*

As seen previously, one has to make some sort of conversion in order to make a meaningful progress in moral formation. The most important aspect in the process of conversion at least for philosophical schools and prophetic religions such as early Christianity was acquiring a right set of doctrines or philosophical teachings,[79] which reorients one's soul and thus one's way of life. In other words, one must be well grounded in the convictions and beliefs of the group to which one belongs in order to make any significant improvement in moral conduct. Such a sequence of moral progress is also evident in *Progress in Virtue* where Plutarch lists specific marks of progress by which one can judge whether he or she is making any moral progress. What is interesting about this list, however, is that the study of philosophy[80] comes at the very beginning of moral progress (*Virt. prof*. 76C),[81] whereas the imitation of virtuous deeds comes at the later stage of moral progress (*Virt. prof*. 84B–C).

The most crucial element in Plutarch's understanding of moral progress is that one should be able to observe one's moral progress and such observation is made possible through the study of Philosophy which "gradually illuminates and purifies the soul" (*Virt. prof*. 76C). That is probably why Plutarch had composed both the *Moralia* and the *Lives*. The *Moralia* is a miscellaneous collection of essays and treaties covering a wide range of topics, which is primarily intended to shape the worldview and values of his readers. The *Lives*, on the other hand, are a collection of biographies, arranged in tandem to help readers shape their behaviour by illuminating the moral virtues or failings of famous men and women. Recently Cooper has argued persuasively that "[the *Moralia*] serves as a precursor to Plutarch's wider project the *Lives*."[82] In other words,

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transformed. I do not yet, however, assure myself, or indulge the hope, that there are no elements left in me which need to be changed. … And indeed this very fact is proof that … it can see its own faults, of which it was previously ignorant" (Seneca, *Ep*. 6.1).

79 Recently Schafer notes that though not always, some can still achieve moral progress by precepts alone without indoctrination. J. Schafer, *Ars Didactica: Seneca's 94th and 95th Letters* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 82.

80 Though Plutarch basically believes that a person's character is basically static, he also presents education as a possible means to developing virtuous behaviour in later life. See Timothy E. Duff, "Models of Education in Plutarch," *JHS* 128 (2008): 1–26; C.B.R. Pelling, "Rhetoric, Paideia, and Psychology in Plutarch's Lives," in *Plutarch and History* (London: The Classical Press of Wales, 1995), 339–347.

81 Similarly, Isocrates argues that philosophy is necessary for a person to rightly imitate the virtuous deeds: "For we exhort young men to the study of philosophy by praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits" (Isocrates, *Evag*. 77).

82 Craig Cooper, "The Moral Interplay Between Plutarch's Political Precepts and Life of Demosthenes." in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of*

Plutarch may have wanted his readers to develop their moral reasoning first through his moral philosophy (*Moralia*)[83] before moving on to develop virtuous behaviour through the reading of his *Lives* that provide them with a series of models either to emulate or to avoid. In fact, the primary purpose of the *Lives* is not to give readers any new moral knowledge but only to reinforce what they already know by helping them become more aware of nuances of their actions.

Plutarch then does not expect his readers to imitate what they read in his biographies immediately but rather argues that it takes time and learning for people to equip themselves with a right set of beliefs through the study of philosophy before they can actually embody the virtuous deeds in their lives. Without having their worldview transformed by the consistent study of philosophy, one will likely be "carried hither and thither in the interval, and oftentimes in the wrong direction" (*Virt. prof*. 77E). This process of strengthening one's moral reasoning through philosophy enables one to discern what is virtuous and what is not in the lives of other people and also in their own lives. Such an improvement in moral reasoning further empowers a person to turn away from the evil desires and to make moral progress by imitating noble deeds. Thus for Plutarch, moral progress was not a sudden conversion but was like a journey that one has to travel for an extended period of time to get to the destination and along the way one should be able to discern how far one has come in terms of one's moral capacity (*Virt. prof*. 75A–B). Without such observable cues, one would lose a sense of direction in his or her pursuit of virtue and finally give up being ethical altogether.[84]

Seneca similarly argues that moral instructions are not effective unless they are grounded in right beliefs and uses the Stoic division of *decreta* (theoretical instruction) and *praecepta* (practical application) in which he bases his practical ethical teachings on philosophical arguments. In other words, Seneca lays out a systematic theoretical instruction on a certain ethical matter and then he gives practical advice on how to do it later on.[85] Dryden helpfully summarises

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the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia' (ed. Anastasios G. Nikolaidis; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 67–83 (68).

83 On the importance of education in moral formation, see Duff, "Education".

84 An ability to control one's passions (ἀπάθεια) is especially crucial for moral progress; neither the deficiency nor the excess of passions is desirable but one has to manage to keep the "due proportions of the passions" (συμμετρίας πάθος, *Virt. mor*. 443C–D) through the proper use of reason (λόγος, *Virt. mor*. 440D). Wright, "Moral Progress," 137–138.

85 Lieve van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62.

three reasons for why Seneca believes that true moral transformation needs more than a list of precepts: "First, precepts cannot be given for every situation in life and therefore reason is needed to deduce the right action in particular situations. … Secondly … philosophy cannot be confined to giving moral advice alone; it is a holistic system aimed at the reorientation of the whole person. … Thirdly … false beliefs obstruct the power of precepts to educate, motivate, and transform."[86]

Among many different doctrines Seneca thinks necessary for moral life, he gives the highest priority to the right conception of God: "he will never make sufficient [moral] progress until he has conceived a right idea of God-regarding him as one who possesses all things, and allots all things, and bestows them without price" (Seneca, *Ep*. 95.48). Thus one's moral formation for Seneca will not be stable and long-lasting unless one is equipped with the kind of worldview or beliefs that can "complement, inform, reinforce and contextualize" moral instructions.[87] Both Seneca and Plutarch then share one thing in common: "a substantial part of the text precedes, and prepares for the proposed exercises."[88] Therefore, it becomes quite evident that the ancients believed in the need for conversion to a particular religious sect or a philosophical school for moral progress, which requires one to embrace a certain set of beliefs or teachings, and one is gradually reinforced through a means of community[89] and education to live according to the newly acquired worldview.[90] In short, philosophy or doctrines serve as the intellectual basis for more practical ethical teachings.

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86 Dryden, *1 Peter*, 58–59. See esp. Seneca *Ep*. 95.12, 34, 38, 44.

87 Dryden, *1 Peter*, 60.

88 van Hoof, *Practical Ethics*, 62.

89 Meeks' definition of 'conversion' is relevant for studying the role of community in moral formation: "Conversion implies a change of reference groups and reference individuals—those groups and persons to whom we look, in fact or in imagination, for standards, for approval or disapproval, for measures of how well we are doing." Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale Univeristy Press, 1993), 48.

90 The concept of worldview is especially relevant in studying ethics because it is through worldview that people interpret the world around themselves and set priorities by sorting out "what is important from what is not, what is of highest value from what is least." Worldview then is not just a way of thinking or perceiving the reality but it actually "stipulates how the world ought to be, and it thus advises how its adherents ought to conduct themselves in the world." Brian J. Walsh et al., *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 32.

4 Moral Progress in John's Gospel

4.1 *Discipleship as Moral Progress*

In light of the ancient understanding of moral progress, can we also identify such traces of moral progress in the Gospel of John? The only kind of progress we find in the Gospel is in terms of discipleship,[91] which refers to the process of coming to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and thus of believers becoming Christ-like in their mission and character. The notion of discipleship in modern thinking may seem religious (spiritual), not ethical. The previous discussion on ancient ethics, however, clearly shows that believing in and/or imitating a god was an important ethical value that was encouraged not only by Christians but also by Hellenistic philosophers. Furthermore, the term μαθητής is generally used in Greek literature to refer to a person who is committed to the way of life taught by a certain teacher (cf. Plato, *Prot*. 315a). Such a depiction of μαθητής as demonstrated in Greek literature coincides well with the notion of discipleship in John's Gospel where disciples are portrayed as those who are committed to growing in the knowledge and the likeness of their teacher, Jesus.

The progress of discipleship is quite evident in the Gospel of John compared to the Synoptics because there is a clear contrast in terms of narrative atmosphere between chs. 1–12 and chs. 13–17. For example, in the first twelve chapters we see that Jesus interacts not only with his disciples but also with the crowds who are often hostile to his teachings, whereas, entering the second half of the Gospel, we find that Jesus exclusively interacts only with his own disciples.[92] More importantly, Jesus's teaching also dramatically changes; the characteristics of Jesus's teachings in the first twelve chapters are apologetic, worldview-transforming, and identity-forming,[93] but in the second half of the Gospel Jesus's teachings become more personal and focused on the prac-

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91 Much work has been done on Johannine discipleship in recent years. For a helpful review of recent studies, see Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 3–22.

92 Marianus Pale Hera, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17* (WUNT II/342; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 37.

93 The relationship between identity and ethics has received much attention in recent years. Tso suggests that identity has three important ethical implications: (1) Identity as a basis of solidarity and difference; (2) Identity as value-laden; (3) Identity as a motivation for morally relevant behaviours. See Marcus K. Tso, *Ethics in the Qumran Community* (WUNT II/292; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 100–103. Cf. Van der Watt writes similarly on identity and behaviour in the Gospel of John. See Jan G. van der Watt, "'Working the Works of God': Identity and Behaviour in the Gospel of John," in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer* (eds. Jan Krans, et al.; NovTSup 149; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 135–150.

tical side of discipleship by urging his disciples to imitate him. In other words, Jesus's invitation to imitation (chs. 13–17) finds its foundation in Christology (chs. 1–12; i.e. Jesus's identity, mission, and relationship to the Father, etc.); only those who are truly transformed by Jesus's teachings about his identity and mission can move on to the next level of discipleship, that is imitating Jesus.

This is not to say that imitation is called for only in the Farewell Discourse, but as will be seen later, there are various instances in the first half of the Gospel that reveal numerous virtuous actions that should be imitated by readers if they are to move on in their moral progress. Such virtuous actions portrayed in the first twelve chapters are, however, primarily targeted to helping readers respond to Jesus's call positively and are mostly performed by characters other than Jesus. Though these virtuous actions found in chs. 1–12 play a crucial role in leading readers to Christ and in shaping readers' moral worldview to some extent, they nonetheless cannot be the supreme moral traits for readers since it is not Jesus who performs or demands those actions, and it is the imitation of Jesus's deeds and teachings that John has in mind as the ultimate goal of moral progress. For that reason, we designate the stage of imitation to the Farewell Discourse not because the first twelve chapters are void of any virtuous deeds that are worthy of imitation but rather it is in the Farewell Discourse that Jesus reveals the virtues *par excellence* that must be embraced by his followers in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world and to make a meaningful advancement in their journey of moral progress.

Here some clarification is necessary as we apply the concept of moral progress to John's Gospel. There is a major difference between Plutarch and John as to how people are enabled to progress in their ethical journey. Plutarch believes that one can make a reasonable progress in one's moral competence through the use of reason and discipline (ἄσκησις). However, such self-reliance is not found in the Gospel of John; rather any meaningful 'moral progress' is possible only through one's positive response to Jesus as will be seen later. Due to such characteristics, John tries to persuade his readers about the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God in the first twelve chapters through various stories of Jesus's encounters with different characters, signs, symbolic language, rhetorical devices such as irony and misunderstanding. Only then does the author in chs. 13–17 lead his readers to the more intimate setting where Jesus exclusively interacts with his disciples and teaches them how to live in this hostile world after his departure. Then here we have two stages of discipleship, that is coming to faith in Jesus as Christ and the Son of God (chs. 1–12) and how that faith (a transformed worldview) enables readers to imitate Jesus (chs. 13–17).

As we will see, one's knowledge of Jesus (Christology) has a ripple effect that not only changes one's relationship with Jesus but also has the transformative

power to advance oneself in moral formation by reshaping the individual's values, priorities, and ultimately one's allegiance to God.[94] Thus the relationship between Christology and imitation in the Gospel of John is similar to what we find in the ancient understanding of the relationship between *decreta* and *praecepta* or κρίσις and ἄσκησις. As Hera rightly argues, "the narrative flow indicates that John intends to impart a christological teaching [chs. 1–12] not for its own sake but to prepare the audience for the message of discipleship he wants to communicate [chs. 13–17]."[95] What these contrasts between chs. 1–12 and chs. 13–17 show is that the author of John's Gospel clearly portrays discipleship as a journey progressing towards the goal of imitating Jesus.

4.2 *Reading John's Gospel Ethically*

Can this process of discipleship then be understood as moral progress? The aim of this study is to contribute to the on-going discussion of John's ethics by demonstrating that the progress of discipleship in John's Gospel can indeed be understood as moral progress in light of our detailed analysis of ancient ethics. In order to corroborate my thesis, this study will utilise a narrative-critical analysis of the final text of John's Gospel, primarily focusing on the rhetorical impact that the text has on the implied reader (henceforth 'readers'). The implied reader is a textual construct that is in complete alignment with the point of view or goals of the implied author[96] and thus perfectly responds to the text's rhetorical devices.[97] This is not to say, however, that what follows in this study flawlessly captures the understanding or perspective of the implied reader or tries to discover a singular, original meaning of the text. In fact, the implied reader's perspective cannot be truly obtained since it is "an idealized abstraction only perceptive in clues suggested by a narrative."[98] Nonetheless, reading John's Gospel as the implied reader has been tested fruitful for deci-

94 Despite the highly christological nature of the Gospel, the Gospel makes it clear that it is God that Jesus came to reveal and that seeing Jesus is seeing God the Father (John 14:9).

95 Hera, *Discipleship*, 85.

96 There is no distinction between the implied author and the narrator in this study.

97 Since so much has been written about narrative criticism, I will not go over the specifics of the theory. See the following books for a fuller discussion. James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design & Point of View in John* (BibInt 56; Leiden: Brill, 2001); Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

98 Nicolas Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of their Faith and Understanding* (WUNT II/290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 6.

phering various literary devices embedded in narratives and thus for finding the most likely meanings of the text.

One of the weaknesses of this approach in studying John's ethics is that a literary analysis alone cannot adequately help us find John's ethical paradigm since ethics is formed by various socio-cultural factors and is presented through literary elements of a particular time and region. In other words, it is crucial to bridge the gap between the implied reader and the authorial audience,[99] another textual construct that is proposed to be knowledgeable about John's Gospel's milieu and its literary influence. Thus we need a reliable counterpart which can verify the validity of our findings at least on matters of ethics. As seen previously, Plutarch fits our criteria since his writings are not only contemporaneous with John's Gospel but are also similar in terms of literary genre.[100] Unlike other literary genres (e.g. ethical treatises, epistles), which tend to give direct injunctions on various ethical matters, Plutarch expects his readers to critically and reflectively engage with his biographies so that they would "abstract moral lessons for themselves from what they read and seek ways to apply such lessons in their own lives, rather than waiting to be told or expecting to be preached at."[101] Thus, it would have been natural for ancient readers to read such stories "with an eye to the moral import—that is, to see them as having at their heart, as Plutarch puts it, 'the revelation of virtue and vice'" (*Alex.* 1.2).[102] The Gospel of John also, it will be argued, utilises a similar set of literary techniques in order to bring about a transformation in readers' moral worldview.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that unlike Plutarch, John does not have separate ethical treaties (e.g. the *Moralia*) that expound his moral philosophy; instead, John tries to advance his readers' moral reasoning implicitly in the first half of the Gospel through various narratives before presenting them with the moral traits that they need to emulate in the Farewell Discourse. One of the criticisms that may arise in applying Plutarch's model of moral progress to John's Gospel is that the imitation of Jesus in this Gospel is not found in the biographical narratives (chs. 1–12) but rather on the sub-genre of the Farewell Discourse. For that reason, some may argue that the comparison of John's Gospel

99 Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," *CI* 4 (1977): 121–141 (127).

100 For a comprehensive treatment on the issue of genre, see Kasper Bro Larsen, ed., *The Gospel of John as Genre Mosaic* (SANt 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

101 Timothy E. Duff, "Plutarch's Lives and the Critical Reader," in *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics* (eds. Geert Roskam and Luc Van der Stockt; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), 59–82 (81).

102 Duff, "Critical Reader," 68.

with the *Lives* of Plutarch may not be fully tenable since Plutarch incites his readers to the imitation of virtuous acts mainly through his biographical works, the *Lives*, whereas John's Gospel presents the imitation of Jesus in the farewell discourse genre. Such an objection is understandable but unfortunately minimises John's literary mastery and stylistic innovation that view genre not so much "as restraints and shackles on authorial creativity … [but] as the very laboratory of the literary and theological imagination."[103]

According to Attridge, John's Gospel "exhibits so much interest in playing with generic conventions, extending them, undercutting them, twisting traditional elements into new and curious shapes, making literary forms do things that did not come naturally to them."[104] In other words, it seems that John creatively uses and sometimes modifies not only common literary and rhetorical elements of his day but also the concept and method of 'moral progress' in order to develop his own ethical paradigm and to fulfill his particular aim as stated in 20:31. Due to the interconnectedness within Plutarch's writings, I will refer to the *Lives* primarily for narrative techniques (e.g. characterization,[105] use of a specific grammatical person, and an appeal to readers' sense of honour, etc.) that Plutarch used for moralizing his readers and to the *Moralia* for ethical concepts that would be helpful for extracting ethical implications from John's narratives.

To achieve our proposed goal, we will explore John's ethics in two phases. In the first part of our study we will be looking at the first twelve chapters of the Gospel to see how the author tries to persuade readers to have faith in Jesus as the Son of God by encouraging them to adopt Jesus's new teachings and worldview. As previously noted, it is imperative for individuals to possess a right set of values before moving on to imitate moral traits exemplified by a noble figure. Hence, readers must reevaluate their old worldview and adopt the worldview reflected in the Gospel in order to understand its message correctly. Without aligning one's worldview to that of the Gospel, one would inevitably end up misunderstanding the words and deeds of Jesus and thus failing to move further in moral progress. Though the author utilises many different stories to

103 Kasper Bro Larsen, "Introduction: The Gospel of John as Genre Mosaic," in *The Gospel of John as Genre Mosaic* (ed. Kasper Bro Larsen; SANt 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 13–24 (16).

104 Attridge, "Genre Bending," 20.

105 Over the last ten years, some important books on characterization in John's Gospel have been published. See Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009); Christopher W. Skinner, *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (LNTS 461; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013); Steven A. Hunt et al., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

transform the readers' worldview, due to the limited space we will focus primarily on three figures (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Blind man).

In each episode, we will refer to Plutarch's writings whenever necessary to show that the kind of transformation that the author intends is not only religious (spiritual) but also ethical in light of the ancient literary practice of shaping readers' moral outlook. It is important to note that this study does not intend to trace a particular character's journey of discipleship (moral progress) but rather to examine how the overall Gospel shapes the readers' moral worldview and thus their behaviour (Plutarch is not also interested in tracing moral progress of his characters in his *Lives* but in inspiring moral progress in the lives of his readers). The second half of the work will focus on how individuals who made a commitment to Jesus are expected to continue in their moral progress by imitating the words and deeds of Jesus. Here a detailed analysis of the ancient understanding of imitation will be dealt with. Again, our limited space does not allow for a complete exegesis of the entire Farewell Discourse but we will confine our attention only on the καθώς passages, which capture the essential moral traits that Jesus wants his followers to imitate.

The scope of this study will be strictly limited to John's Gospel and thus the Gospel's inter-influence between the Johannine epistles or the Synoptics will not be considered. The main reason for such a limited scope is to see the value of John's ethics on its own terms. Due to John's lack of explicit ethical expressions, many scholars have approached John's ethics with insights gained from other parts of the NT, especially the Johannine epistles. Such a tendency may be responsible for continued unappreciation of John's ethics in NT scholarship and thus this study will give attention solely to John's Gospel. From now on, this study will call the author of John's Gospel "John" for the sake of convenience without attributing authorship to John, the son of Zebedee. Finally, though this work is generally concerned with ethics in John's Gospel, the immediate concern lies in whether John's discipleship can be understood as moral progress. For that reason, this study will provide a working definition of 'moral progress', not ethics. In light of our investigation of Greco-Roman ethical landscape, moral progress can be loosely defined as any sort of continuous change towards a moral ideal assumed by a particular community in a particular period in time. Building upon such a general definition, moral progress in John's Gospel can be understood more concretely as *a total reorientation of worldview and of the understanding of the self which is effected by one's growing knowledge of Jesus's identity and mission, and which further enables one to grow in the likeness of Jesus by embodying the moral traits exemplified by Jesus himself*.

CHAPTER 3

Reading the Story of Nicodemus Ethically

1 A Brief Summary Leading up to Nicodemus

Before embarking on the analysis of Nicodemus' story, a brief summary of John 1 and 2 is in order due to the sequential nature of narratives. The Gospel begins with a prologue,[1] which sets the tone of the entire Gospel and introduces readers to some of the most essential Johannine concepts (ζωὴ, φῶς, σκοτία, σάρξ, ἀλήθεια, etc.) that will be central to understanding the whole message of the Gospel.[2] Basically three elements stand out in the prologue: the divine identity and incarnation of the *Logos*, God's salvific plan for the world, and the consequence of rejecting[3] or accepting that incarnate *Logos*. It is John's intention that readers understand these three essential facets early on in the Gospel in order to make a smooth transition to the subsequent narratives. The use of the first person plurals (ἐθεασάμεθα, ἐλάβομεν) in 1:14, 16 reflects a narrative technique that was commonly used by Plutarch who in his prologues often used the first person plurals in order to encourage his readers to share "the same goals and the same attitudes as [he]."[4] Plutarch in the proem of *Tiberius Gracchus* begins with a first-person pronoun "we," which initially seems to refer to Plutarch himself but then his use of "we" begins to take a corporate nuance which includes both readers and the narrator:[5]

1 The importance of beginnings is well recognised in NT scholarship; see Dennis E. Smith, "How Gospels Begin," *Semeia* 52 (1991): 185–192; Morna D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys that Open the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1997), 64–83. For an extensive research on John's prologue, see Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (LNTS 294; London: T&T Clark, 2006). Ancient rhetoric also emphasises the critical role of beginnings for understanding the rest of narratives: Aristotle, *Rhet*. 3.14.6; Quintilian, *Inst*. 4.1; Lucian, *How to Write History* 53. Some think that 1:1–18 should not be taken as a prologue. P.J. Williams, "Not the Prologue of John," *JSNT* 33 (2011): 375–386.

2 Christopher W. Skinner, "Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization: Reading John's Characters through the Lens of the Prologue," *Characters*, 111–127 (113).

3 Readers will come to see that it is not the lack of evidence that causes unbelief among the crowd but people reject Jesus even after having seen many signs that Jesus performed in his earthly ministry (cf. 12:37). Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 37.

4 Timothy E. Duff, "The Prologues," in *A Companion to Plutarch* (ed. Mark Beck; West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 333–349 (340).

5 Cf. *Per*. 1.2, 1.4; *Sert*. 1.6; *Demetr*. 1.6.

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> Now that ***we*** (ἡμεῖς) have duly finished (ἀποδεδωκότες) the first part of our story, ***we*** have to contemplate (ἔχομεν) fates no less tragic than those of Agis and Cleomenes in the lives of the Roman couple, Tiberius and Caius, which ***we*** set in parallel (ἀντιπαραβάλλοντες).
>
> *Ti. C. Gracch* 1.1

As seen in this passage, Plutarch is deliberately engaging his readers as if they are doing a "joint investigation"[6] of these lives. Such a literary technique seems to be at work in John's prologue as John encourages his readers to read these narratives carefully for themselves and to become part of the community that has already seen the glory of the *Logos* and received his grace.

Readers would have difficulty understanding the profound message of the prologue at this point of narrative but the prologue contains a comparison of the *Logos* (light, Jesus) with two great historical figures that reveal Jesus's uniqueness and superiority. First, the prologue portrays the *Logos* greater than the John (the Baptist), who clearly understood his role as a witness to the light. Though John's Gospel does not provide too much information about John, readers can easily presume the influential status John must have enjoyed during his ministry since he was mistaken for Elijah who was one of the greatest prophets Jews had ever known (1:21). Furthermore, the fact that Pharisees sent out a delegation to confirm John's identity and credentials shows that John was someone whom the religious leaders may have considered a possible threat to their authority due to his increasing popularity among the crowds (1:19–24). Second, Jesus is also depicted as to be greater than Moses since Jesus is the only one who was with God (1:1) and who had uninterrupted access to the bosom of the Father (1:8). Moses certainly had a privileged relationship with God as the representative of God's people but he was only allowed to see the glimpse of God's back, whereas Jesus is not only in the perfect unity with God but he is also the only one who can make God known to the world. Since Jesus is superior to Moses in every aspect, it is reasonable to conclude that what Jesus gave to the world (grace and truth) is far greater than what Moses gave (the law). The prologue then provides qualitative information concerning the divine identity of Jesus by comparing him with two highly influential figures and thus prepares readers to understand the unfolding narrative correctly.

6 C.B.R. Pelling, "Plutarch," in *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature* (eds. Irene J.F. De Jonge, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 403–422 (412).

After the prologue, readers are introduced to a series of episodes in which Jesus's first disciples are called. In 1:37 the two disciples heard their teacher John calling Jesus "the Lamb of God," and as a result of John's testimony, his disciples followed (ἠκολούθησα) and stayed (ἔμειναν) with Jesus that day (1:39). Andrew, who was one of the two who heard John's witness, found (εὑρίσκει) his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus (1:41–42). The next day, a similar situation occurred but this time it was Jesus who called Philip to follow him (1:43). Like Andrew, Philip also led Nathanael to Jesus by claiming that he found the one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about. Despite Nathanael's initial unbelief, Philip urged Nathanael to come and see (1:46; ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε), and having met Jesus himself, Nathanael later on made a startling statement about Jesus, "You are the Son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ)! You are the King of Israel (βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ)!" (1:49).

Richard Bauckham argues that there are two levels of meaning imbedded in these episodes, especially regarding the verbs used to convey the characters' action.[7] Here readers come across recurring key verbs (ἀκολουθέω, μένω, ἔρχομαι, ὁράω, εὑρίσκω), which are closely linked to the theme of discipleship in John's Gospel, and such a link becomes clearer as the narrative develops. For example, the verb ἀκολουθέω means more than physical accompaniment of Jesus but refers to a personal commitment to follow Jesus even "on the way of the cross"[8] (12:26).[9] On the contrary, leaving Jesus in 6:66 does not simply indicate a temporary physical detachment from Jesus but one's unwillingness to accept the call of discipleship. Furthermore, some of the significant titles of Jesus appear in the first chapter of the Gospel (Word 1:1, 14; God 1:1, 18; Only Son 1:14, 18; cf. 3:16, 18; Christ 1:17, 1:41; Messiah 1:41; Lord 1:23; Lamb of God 1:29, 36; Chosen One of God 1:34; Son of God 1:49; King of Israel 1:49). Though the disciples' (readers') understanding of Jesus is likely to be rather limited at this point of the narrative, these titles nonetheless draw the readers' attention to the significant role Jesus will play in the rest of the Gospel.

Coming into John 2, readers learn about Jesus's first sign of changing water into wine, which reveals Jesus's glory (cf. 1:14) and signals the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry (2:11). Jesus's subsequent act of cleansing the temple foreshadows the upcoming confrontation between Jesus and the Jews and ultimately Jesus's death and resurrection (2:21–22). What these two events seem to

7 Similarly, Chennattu, *Discipleship*, 29.

8 Richard Bauckham, "Dimensions of Meaning in the Gospel's First Week," in *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 131–184 (145).

9 Other verbs such as 'come and see', 'stay' and 'find' also contribute to the understanding of Johannine discipleship. Bauckham, "First Week," 143–150.

signify is that some sort of replacement is being expected and slowly realised with the coming of Jesus as symbolised in water turning into wine and the temple replaced by Jesus's own body. Understanding the implications of these two incidents will be helpful for readers to grasp the message of the Nicodemus story more deeply where readers will see "the transformation from a lower order of existence, 'flesh,' to a higher order or 'Spirit.'"[10]

As seen above, the literary function of the first two chapters is significant since it stirs up anticipation among readers by providing up front some of the essential motifs of the Gospel and also highlighting the importance of following Jesus by participating in the journey of discipleship. Despite the vital role the first two chapters play in the Gospel, John has not yet made very clear to readers what it means to believe in Jesus as Christ and the Son of God, and what kind of transformation it requires of converts. In this opening context of the Gospel, the story of Nicodemus functions as the main entry point into John's thought-world because, as will be seen, the message this narrative conveys is crucial for understanding the rest of the Gospel both theologically and ethically. For that reason, John seems to have placed the story of Nicodemus strategically after the opening narrative sequences of John's Gospel. This particular narrative has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention from many different angles, and most of the studies have tried to demonstrate whether Nicodemus has shown any meaningful progress in terms of his allegiance to Jesus; the answer to this issue varies.[11] The following sections will examine how John presents the story of Nicodemus as a channel of transforming readers' worldview and thus effecting moral transformation in his readers.

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10 Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 153.

11 For the scholars who see Nicodemus as a representative of the inadequate, non-saving faith, see M. de Jonge, "Nicodemus and Jesus: Some Observations on Misunderstanding and Understanding in the Fourth Gospel," *BJRL* 53 (1970): 337–359 (349); Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72 (54); Francis J. Moloney, "From Cana to Cana (John 2:1–4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist's Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith," *Sales* 40 (1978): 817–843 (832); Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 136. For those who see Nicodemus making positive progress towards Jesus, see F.P. Cotterell, "The Nicodemus Conversation: A Fresh Appraisal," *ExpT* 96 (1985): 237–242 (241); D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 629; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 205; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 187; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2nd ed.; WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1999), 47.

2 Ethical Reading of Nicodemus

2.1 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 1–2*

The narrative begins by introducing a man (ἄνθρωπος) named Nicodemus, who is a Φαρισαῖος[12] and ἄρχων τῶν Ἰουδαίων.[13] Though it is not clear why John describes Nicodemus in such a detailed manner, it is quite obvious that John would have not mentioned these details if they were not significant for understanding the story (cf. 21:25). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine fully each role John assigns to Nicodemus but a brief analysis will be enough to show that John gives his readers enough hints to appreciate the significant status of Nicodemus in first-century Judaism. The first hint John gives to readers regarding the identity of Nicodemus is that Nicodemus is a Pharisee. The Pharisees are already mentioned in 1:24, and in light of 1:19,[14] readers know that the Pharisees are a religious group that has the political authority to send the delegation to enquire John about his identity and his ministry. Second, the fact that Nicodemus is 'a ruler of the Jews' may indicate that he was also a member of Sanhedrin, which was the Supreme Court in Jerusalem on judicial-religious matters. Such a hypothesis is reinforced by 7:45–52 where Nicodemus is present at a meeting of the chief priests and Pharisees.[15]

12 At this point of narrative, readers do not have a clear understanding of the role the Pharisees play in the Gospel but in the later chapters readers will come to recognise that the Pharisees are those who are responsible for the hostility towards Jesus and his disciples, and ultimately for the death of Jesus.

13 Much work has been done on the issue of Johannine anti-Judaism and we cannot cover all the different arguments proposed by different scholars. Casey gives a harsh verdict on John's Gospel as irredeemable due to its pervasive anti-Jewish nature (Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?*, 3, 223–229). Lincoln, on the other hand, argues that such a one-sided judgment on John's use of the term *the Jews* is also problematic. Whether one sides with Casey or Lincoln, it is important to note that "holding to the truth of John's Gospel in any meaningful sense demands a willingness to bear some of the scandal of particularity and to maintain that, with the mission and person of Jesus in the midst of Israel and with the proclamation of his followers, something decisive occurred that brought about and continues to bring about a division between belief and unbelief" (Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 404). See Reimund Bieringer et al., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2001) for both sides of the issue. Also Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 313–322.

14 That Sadducees never appear in the Gospel of John may be due to the fact that the Gospel was written after the destruction of the temple, which made the Sadducees no longer a significant power in Judaism. Carson, *John*, 145.

15 Cf. Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Relationship between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observation on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus," *NTS* 42 (1996): 506–522.

Nicodemus is then not only a religious leader but also a political leader who would have "enjoyed a prominent social, economic and religious status."[16]

At the textual level, Nicodemus has been perceived as a representative figure of various groups[17] but recently scholars have focused on the ambiguous character of Nicodemus and how that ambiguity functions within the Gospel.[18] Despite numerous proposals on how Nicodemus as a character should be identified and understood, it is likely that in the first century a person like Nicodemus would have been considered a model to be emulated and respected. John might have given a detailed description of Nicodemus in the beginning, knowing such cultural expectations, to make readers expect the following story to be full of insightful lessons to take home—it is hard to think otherwise given the identity of Nicodemus.

Immediately after the generous introduction of Nicodemus, the story, however, takes an abrupt detour in v. 2, and John goes on to tell his readers that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (νύξ).[19] Though there are various proposals[20]

16 Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 78.

17 Bultmann argues that Nicodemus is a representative of both Judaism and humanity (Rudolf Bultmann, *John*, 134, 143–144); Barrett thinks that Nicodemus functions as a representative character whose conversation with Jesus represents "the dialogue of Church and Synagogue" (Barrett, *John*, 169); Martyn regards Nicodemus as a representative of secret believers (J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology*, 75); Rensberger sees Nicodemus as a "communal symbolic figure" who possesses inadequate faith and courage (David Rensberger, *Overcoming the World*, 40).

18 Jouette M. Bassler, "Mixed Signals: Nicodemus in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 635–646 (645); Terence Donaldson, "Nicodemus: A Figure of Ambiguity in a Gospel of Certainty," *Consensus* 24 (1998): 121–124; Gabi Renz, "Nicodemus: An Ambiguous Disciple? A Narrative Sensitive Investigaton," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John* (ed. John Lierman; WUNT II/219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 255–283 (255); Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 23–40; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 84. Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?: Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question* (PTMS 115; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 33.

19 In ancient Greek myth and religion darkness is often used symbolically to denote "ignorance, evil and the ominous, violence and barbarianism, and the world beyond (xv)," whereas light symbolises "vision, clairvoyance, the Olympian order, the salvation of the psyche, and the world we inhabit" (xv). However, it is also true that such a dualistic mode does not apply uniformly in every situation but the subtle nuances exist in between. For a comprehensive treatment on the Greek usage of light and darkness, see Menelaos Christopoulos et al., eds., *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010). A similar usage of darkness is also found in Jewish tradition especially in the Qumran scrolls. For a helpful introduction on the symbols of evil in Jewish tradition, see Henning Graf Reventlow et al., eds., *The Problem of Evil and its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSOTSup 366; London: Continuum, 2004).

20 Some other popular explanations for Nicodemus' nocturnal visitation are drawn from the

for why Nicodemus visits Jesus at night, the fact that John reminds readers of this detail later on (19:39) signifies that it is more than a temporal description, and night (cf. σκοτία, 1:5; 8:12; 12:35) here may function as a symbol that indicates "the realm of death, lies, and ignorance … the sphere of moral and spiritual opposition to God."[21] We may see this symbolic meaning of night through various semantic and syntactic links available up to ch. 3. First, in the prologue we see the contrast between light (φῶς) and darkness (σκοτία) (1:4–5) in which darkness is viewed as something to be rejected and the light as something to be received (λαμβάνω) and believed (πιστεύω) in order to become a child of God (1:12). Second, in 2:23–25 we read that Jesus did not entrust himself to those who believed in him because of the signs Jesus performed (τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει), and the same phrase (τὰ σημεῖα ποιεῖν ἃ σὺ ποιεῖς) is repeated in 3:2 where Nicodemus expresses his interest in Jesus probably due to the same reason as seen in 2:23–25. Third, ἄνθρωπος is used in a negative sense in 2:25 where Jesus is said not to entrust himself to men because Jesus knows what is in man. Having endowed ἄνθρωπος with such negative connotations, John uses ἄνθρωπος to introduce Nicodemus in 3:1, and it seems to indicate that Nicodemus is to be viewed on an equal footing with the crowds. Finally, in the closing scene of the Nicodemus story the narrator explicitly relates darkness with πονηρός and φαῦλος (3:19–21). From these contextual clues, readers can see that νύξ in 3:2 carries more than a temporal meaning.

In fact, relating darkness with evil or vice was not uncommon in the minds of ancient philosophers. In *De latenter vivendo*, a polemic against Epicurus, Plutarch criticises the Epicurean concept of "quiet life," which encourages the followers to withdraw themselves from the multitude and public affairs. Plutarch argues that the Epicureans want to live their lives unknown to others so that "every pleasure may freely be indulged without detection" (*Lat. viv.* 1129B). Furthermore, such a way of living requires darkness (σκοτία) and night (νύξ) to conceal their evil deeds and thus forgoes an opportunity to be corrected and reprimanded by others (cf. 3:20). On the other hand, for someone who "extols God and justice and providence, in ethics law and society and participation in affairs" (*Lat. viv.* 1129C), has no need to live unknown. It is striking to see that Plutarch uses the same words (σκοτία and νύξ) as in John's Gospel

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fact that rabbis often studied and had theological discussion until late at night or Nicodemus simply wanted to have an undisturbed, private talk with Jesus. However, in light of 7:50–52, it is more likely that Nicodemus visits Jesus at night not to lose face before his colleagues.

21 Renz, "Nicodemus," 261. Similarly, Brown also argues that night refers to "the realm of evil, untruth, and ignorance (9:4; 11:10; 13:30)." Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday 1966), 1:130.

to describe the evil side of human action, and that he argues further that the one who pursues the pleasures of the flesh "wraps himself in darkness (σκοτία) and buries his life in an empty tomb" (*Lat. vív.* 1130B). With these hints at hand, perceptive readers could predict that the story of Nicodemus would not be as straightforward as one might have expected at the beginning, and the identity of Nicodemus must be reevaluated from an esteemed leader of Israel to an ambiguous figure who appears to have lost himself in the pursuit of the truth.

2.2 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 3–8*

Despite the double "ἀμὴν" formula, which indicates the significance of Jesus's following remarks, what follows in v. 3 seems at first rather like a puzzling statement because Jesus engages in a topic that is not asked by Nicodemus. There is a chiasm, however, between v. 2 and v. 3 since Jesus replies by simply reversing the clauses used by Nicodemus. In v. 2 Nicodemus says to Jesus, "*no one can* do these signs that you do *unless* God is with him" (οὐδεὶς γὰρ δύναται ... ἐὰν μὴ) and in v. 3 Jesus replies, "*unless one* is born again (from above), *he cannot* see the Kingdom of God" (ἐὰν μή ... οὐ δύναται). Jesus's reply then is not irrelevant, but provides a perfect parallel and even an answer to Nicodemus' enquiry in v. 2: "Just as it is impossible to do what Jesus has been doing unless 'God is with him,' so it is impossible to 'see the kingdom of God' unless one is 'born from above.'"[22]

At this point, readers are as confused as Nicodemus about what Jesus means by ἄνωθεν because the word carries a double meaning and thus can be understood in either of two ways—'again' or 'from above'. It is not clear whether John expects his use of ἄνωθεν to be understood by his readers only in one of two ways or in both ways.[23] Most scholars, however, agree that the problem of Nicodemus' response in v. 4 lies in the fact that he reaches the conclusion too quickly regarding the meaning of Jesus's remark without even considering the second possible meaning of ἄνωθεν—from above. Such limited understanding confirms Nicodemus' origin (νύξ) and further highlights the fact that the concept of 'γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν' is beyond his religious and intellectual background. In other words, his understanding remains in the physical realm and consequently, he finds Jesus's comment astonishing and even absurd.[24]

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22 J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 179.

23 Richard argues that both meanings are at work in v. 3 and thus Jesus's saying should be taken to mean: "the believer must be born again, from above." E. Richard, "Expressions of Double Meaning and their Function in the Gospel of John," *NTS* 31 (1985): 96–112 (104).

24 Readers have already seen in the Prologue that one who is born of "αἱμα, θελήματος σαρκὸς, θελήματος ἀνδρὸς" is not fit to be one of the children of God (1:13). Cf. Rudolf Schnack-

Although Nicodemus' attitude towards Jesus is not as hostile as other Jews as will be seen in later chapters, he nonetheless belongs to a group that values its tradition more than the truth Jesus came to bring (1:17).

Nicodemus' misunderstanding is not in vain, however, from the perspective of readers because it allows Jesus to expound in the following verses what he means by 'γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν.' Here we need to pay attention to the way John describes the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Unlike the genre of epistle where "an author seeks to persuade through a course of reasoning that is fairly explicit and often linear, narrative authors do their "persuading" most often implicitly, through story and point of view."[25] Among various literary devices John utilises in the Gospel, misunderstanding[26] is one of John's most important literary devices to transform his readers' worldview. According to Culpepper, the way misunderstanding occurs in the Gospel can be described as follows:

> (1) Jesus makes a statement which is ambiguous, metaphorical, or contains a double-entendre; (2) his dialogue partner responds either in terms of the literal meaning of Jesus' statement or by a question or protest which

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enburg, *The Gospel According to St. John: Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1–4* (trans. Kevin Smyth; III vols.; London: Burnes & Oates, 1968), 1:368.

25 Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 140.

26 The nature and function of misunderstanding in the Gospel are disputed among scholars. Herbert Leroy defines misunderstanding as "concealed riddles" (Herbert Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis*, 1, 6), whereas François Vouga attributes the origin of misunderstanding to the concept of revelation that can be understood only by those who accept Jesus (François Vouga, *Le cadre historique et l'intention théologique de Jean*, 32–33). Barrett and Painter both understand misunderstanding in light of the original historical setting. Barrett argues that "they [misunderstandings] represent in miniature the total reaction of Judaism to Christ; the Jews perceived only what was superficially visible in Jesus and naturally rejected the absurd suggestion that he should be the Son of God" (Barrett, *John*, 200). Similarly, Painter summarises the significance of misunderstanding as follows: "The misunderstanding motif is historically based, dramatically developed and has a pedagogical purpose in the structure of the Gospel. John wrote to remove inadequate attitudes to Jesus which would not be able to stand the test of Jewish persecution" (John Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian*, 82). It is not clear whether John used misunderstanding simply as a literary device or to inform readers about what actually happened at the time of writing between the Jews and early Christians. We can guess with some confidence, however, as to what kind of effect this literary device might have had on readers. Culpepper persuasively suggests that "the most obvious function [of misunderstanding] is to enforce a marked distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider,' between those who understand Jesus and those who do not" (Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 164). In other words, John wants his readers to identify themselves not with the Jews but with *insiders* who not only understand but also appreciate the true meaning of Jesus's words and deeds.

> shows that he or she had missed the higher meaning of Jesus' words; (3) in most instances an explanation is then offered by Jesus or (less frequently) by the narrator.[27]

These passages of misunderstanding "allow the evangelist to highlight important teachings of Jesus, especially with regard to his otherworldly provenance and destiny"[28] and to "lead the reader to view the story from a higher vantage point and share the judgments which the 'whispering wizard' conveys by means of various nods, winks, and gestures."[29] It is interesting to note that Culpepper places *misunderstanding* along with *irony* and *symbolism* in the category of the silent communication (implicit commentary) and argues that John continuously communicates his message through *implicit* communication and thus "what seems clear and simple on the surface is never so simple for the perceptive reader because of the opacity and complexity of the gospel's subsurface signals."[30]

As seen above, misunderstanding has an important function in terms of challenging readers' existing worldview and thus helping readers share the same values and assumptions with the narrator. Such a literary function of misunderstanding is at work in 3:4–8.[31] Here John focuses on Nicodemus' misunderstanding in order to emphasise both the necessity of rebirth and the means through which one can achieve that. John uses the image of birth to capture the theme of "initiation into eternal life as entry into the new order"[32] and expresses it in terms of "ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ" (v. 3). It is important to note that John in v. 5 repeats and replaces the key phrase "γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν" with "γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος."[33] Here the repetition (with some minor variations),[34] which is another important literary device in John's Gospel, is used

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27 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 152. Cf. Skinner argues that misunderstanding is the major literary key, which can be used to understand Johannine characters. Skinner, "Misunderstanding," 111–127.

28 Köstenberger, *Theology*, 142.

29 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 151.

30 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, ibid.

31 For the important question of whether we could use modern literary methods for ancient texts, see Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 31–60 (esp. 53–56).

32 Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel; The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 43.

33 The question of whether 'water' and 'spirit' carry any sacramental connotations is beyond the scope of this work. For a helpful discussion on this topic, see Bauckham, "Sacraments?," *Glory*, 77–107.

34 Despite some variations, Keck thinks they basically mean the same: "being begotten of

for the purpose of "expanding, reconfirming, and reestablishing of a particular theme,"[35] and here John wants to enhance his readers' understanding of this crucial concept of rebirth. Though various interpretations[36] are possible regarding the phrase 'water and spirit', the fact that John only retains 'spirit' in vv. 6 and 8 may show that Jesus's interest is confined mainly to the working of the spirit. In fact, in v. 6 Jesus connects the idea of rebirth with the principle of 'like produces like' and contrasts flesh against spirit only (not water and spirit).[37] Put differently, what is born of flesh cannot overcome its fleshly nature and the only way one can be spiritual is to be born of spirit.

Though John's use of flesh does not refer to the sinful nature of humanity as sometimes seen in the Pauline epistles (cf. 1:14), flesh nonetheless signifies what is inadequate to enter the Kingdom of God. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the phrase βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ is not a common theme in the Gospel as it is replaced mainly by αἰώνιος ζωή, and John also does not use 'repentance' but γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν as the requirement for entry into the Kingdom of God (Matt 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32). Despite the limited presence of the term 'Kingdom of God', one thing becomes quite obvious; John is not interested in the '*when*' but '*how*' of the Kingdom of God.[38] In other words, John does not emphasise the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God as seen in the Synoptics but rather how one can see (ὁράω)[39] and enter (εἰσέρχομαι) the Kingdom of God. By equat-

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the Spirit = being begotten of water and the Spirit = being begotten from above = being begotten from God = believing in his name = receiving Logos-Light = receiving power to become children of God." Leander E. Keck, "Derivation as Destiny: "Of-ness" in Johannine Christology, Anthropology, and Soteriology," in *Exploring the Gospel of John* (eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 274–288 (277–278).

35 Jan G. van der Watt, "Repetition and Functionality in the Gospel According to John: Some Initial Explorations," in *Repetition and Variation in the Fourth Gospel* (eds. G. Van Belle, et al.; BETL CCXXIII; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 87–108 (106).

36 Regarding the meaning of the phrase "water and spirit," three dominant positions exist: (1) the first position treats "water and spirit" as two contrasting elements, the former referring to physical birth and the latter spiritual birth; (2) the second position see "water and spirit" as one entity because of the single use of the preposition ἐξ; (3) the third position connects water to "baptism as a rite of cleaning and initiation" (69). For a fuller discussion of each option, see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Herder, 2002), 68–71.

37 Cf. Matt 7:16–20; 12:33–35; Gal 6:7–8; Jas 3:12.

38 Chrys Caragounis, "The Kingdom of God: Common and Distinct Elements Between John and the Synoptics," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (eds. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 125–134 (126).

39 'Seeing' in the Gospel often refers to more than a sensory perception but to the realm of experience that leads to belief in Jesus (1:14, 50–51; 3:11, 32; 5:19; 6:40; 9:39; 14:7, 9; 17:24;

ing the Kingdom of God with the notion of rebirth in 3:3 and 3:5, John fulfills two important purposes for his readers. First, John lets his readers know that the notion of rebirth is nothing new but simply the Johannine view of conversion[40] or entering the 'Kingdom of God'. Second, distinct from the Synoptics, which describe conversion "around the motif of the child as a natural representative of the qualities necessary for inhering the Kingdom of God," John uses a more radical description, which treats conversion as "becoming something entirely new."[41]

The use of the neuter participle τὸ γεγεννημένον instead of the masculine participle in v. 6 indicates that Jesus's demand for rebirth does not apply only to Nicodemus but is "a truth of general application,"[42] which is also intentionally aimed at his readers. As will be seen later, John consciously uses various rhetorical tools along the way in order to engage his readers intimately and to invite them to the scene not only as spectators but also as those who are obligated to examine their own lives in light of what they read. Jesus's word of advice to Nicodemus not to marvel (θαυμάσῃς) in v. 7 also adds extra tension to the already awkward situation between Nicodemus and Jesus since Nicodemus who is supposed to be an expert in Scriptures is being taught by Jesus who has not received a proper Scriptural training. Jesus further connects the idea of rebirth with the imagery of wind to show Nicodemus that spiritual birth is like wind that though its origin and movement may be mysterious, its effect is not only real but also cannot be manipulated by human control (v. 8).

2.3 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 9–15*

Despite Jesus's continued explanation and invitation to light, Nicodemus' answer in v. 9 (πῶς δύναται ταῦτα γενέσθαι;) confirms that he has not still completely emerged out of darkness. In fact, his understanding of Jesus's words has not progressed even a tiny bit over the course of conversation, and he is nowhere close to light at this point. Jesus's rebuke to Nicodemus in v. 10 (σὺ εἶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις;) shows a sharp contrast with the narrator's generous introduction to him in v. 1. In v. 10 readers are given another

19:35–37; 20:8, 25, 29). Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel* (3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 102–104; Cornelis Bennema, "Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God: A Study in Johannine Epistemology," in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God* (eds. M. Healy and R. Parry; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 107–133 (115); Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 142–143.

40 See Chapter 2 where conversion is discussed as the first step of moral progress.

41 Caragounis, "Kingdom," 127.

42 Morris, *John*, 194.

title for Nicodemus, 'the teacher (ὁ διδάσκαλος) of Israel', and John's explicit use of the definite pronoun may highlight that Nicodemus is not simply one of the teachers of Israel but he is the teacher "*par excellence*."[43] Here Nicodemus seems to be introduced deliberately as *the teacher of Israel*, instead of *the teacher of the Jews* for a rhetorical purpose. Keen readers may be reminded of the scene where Nathanael confesses that Jesus is *the King of Israel* (1:49). Nathanael's confession is not only in the highest terms but is also accurate because Jesus has proved his power as *the King of Israel* by knowing who Nathanael was before Philip brought him to Jesus. Similarly, Nicodemus as *the teacher of Israel* should have known these things because Jesus has been teaching only earthly things so far but unlike Jesus, Nicodemus fails miserably in his role as *the teacher of Israel* (3:12).

Here we need to pay attention to the way John involves his readers in the story of Nicodemus up to this point. At every turn of conversation, John has used subtle literary tools such as misunderstanding, double meaning, the intentional use of various pronouns and more importantly social expectations of his readers to assert that if a person like Nicodemus (3:1) who seems most qualified for entry into the Kingdom of God needs to be born again, no one[44] can be exempt from such a requirement of rebirth. The fact that everyone has to be born again from above in order to ἰδεῖν or εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ confirms the existence of two realms, the realm of σάρξ and of πνεῦμα (v. 6) between which no crossing is possible except through supernatural intervention.[45] What John seems to emphasise in the first ten verses is that there is an unquestionable chasm between the beliefs of Nicodemus and the worldview that Jesus is advocating.

Beginning with v. 11, Nicodemus is no more present and "fades off into the darkness whence he came,"[46] and Jesus now speaks in monologue until v. 15. Interestingly, Jesus changes the subject from the singular to the plural (οἴδαμεν, λαλοῦμεν, ἑωράκαμεν, μαρτυροῦμεν), and this grammatical change may refer readers back to Nicodemus' use of the plural in v. 2 (οἴδαμεν) where he appears to speak on behalf of a larger group that he is part of. For a sophisticated writer like John, however, such an explanation may be too simplistic and does not

43 Köstenberger, *John*, 125.

44 The use of ἄνθρωπος in v. 1 and τις in v. 3 may signify that *everyone* must be born from above in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

45 C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 304. Such a division between flesh and spirit is further elaborated in John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

46 Brown, *John*, 1:144.

do justice to the intentional use of the first-person plurals in ancient narratives. As seen previously in the prologue, the use of the first-person plurals often gives readers a sense of attachment both to the story and the narrator, and it is such an effect that many ancient writers go after when they use the first-person plurals in narratives. Similarly, by making a grammatical shift, John confirms that what Nicodemus has seen and known regarding the identity of Jesus is inadequate, whereas what Jesus has seen and known from above is not only trustworthy but also leads believers to eternal life—thus readers should be eager to see and know what Jesus has seen and known.

John knows well, however, that such a simple assertion will not be persuasive enough for readers who have not yet fully understood or appreciated the identity and mission of Jesus. Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus up to v. 10 has been dominated by misunderstandings, and no concrete evidence[47] has been offered yet to show how one can be born from above. Jesus's explanation becomes more explicit as the story develops and thus affirms that Jesus himself is the only one who can reveal the truth about the heavenly things since he is the only one who has descended from heaven (3:13; cf. 1:1–2; 1:18). Not only does Jesus alone have "access to heavenly secrets,"[48] but also Jesus alone gives eternal life. To prove that, in 3:14–15 Jesus creates a *synkrisis* between the Son of Man and the serpent[49] (ultimately with Moses) in the wilderness (Num 21) by which the Israelites gained healing from snakes' deadly bite. As the bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole, the Son of Man must also be lifted up. What they provide, however, is significantly different; the serpent only provided temporary healing, whereas the Son of Man provides eternal life to those who believe in him.[50]

As seen above, John is making a rhetorical move by shifting the readers' attention to the deeds of both the serpent and the Son of Man in order to bring

47 The phrase "born of water and the Spirit" in v. 5 may give readers some idea as to the means of rebirth, but many readers would still find it ambiguous regarding the meaning of such a birth.

48 Meeks, "Man from Heaven," 53.

49 A *synkrisis* between a person and an animal is not uncommon in the ancient world. Plutarch utilises a similar kind of synkrisis in his *Life of Alcibiades*: "He had, as they say, one power which transcended all others, and proved an implement of his chase for men: that of assimilating and adapting himself to the pursuits and lives of others, thereby assuming more violent changes than the chameleon. That animal, however, as it is said, is utterly unable to assume one colour, namely, white; but Alcibiades could associate with good and bad alike, and found naught that he could not imitate and practice" (Plutarch, *Alc.* 23.4).

50 Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 87.

out the superiority of Jesus as the giver of eternal life. In fact, evaluating one's life based on deeds was a common rhetorical practice in the ancient world.[51] For example, Plutarch in the *Synkrisis of Solon and Publicola* initially praises Solon's deeds more than those of Publicola since "he led the way and followed no man, and it was alone and without colleagues that he effected the most and greatest of his public measures" (*Comp. Sol. Publ.* 3.2). Publicola gets nonetheless more credit for his deeds at the end because unlike Solon who left Athens as soon as he made his laws, Publicola remained and preserved the order in Rome without any subterfuges and by taking the greatest risks against the party of Tarquins, the traitors (*Comp. Sol. Publ.* 3.3–4.4). Despite both Solon and Publicola being great leaders, Plutarch still acknowledges Publicola as greater of the two because his deeds resulted in lasting benefits for the Romans. In light of such a rhetorical practice in antiquity, we see a similar rhetorical effect at work in v. 14; John is not making a comparison between good versus bad but rather good versus better. In other words, John through the *synkrisis* does not necessarily negate the healing God has performed for his people in the wilderness but simply wants to prove that Jesus is superior to the serpent (thus ultimately to Moses) both because what Jesus offers is far greater and Jesus will be lifted up (ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ) of his own accord for the sake of others, whereas the snake was lifted up passively by someone's will.

Before going any further in this narrative analysis, it seems appropriate to pause and examine the way John influences and engages his readers through various rhetorical tools up to v. 15. One of Plutarch's important strategies to change his readers' moral perspective is to help readers "compare his own life with those of the men about whom he is reading, as though looking in a mirror, asking himself how he would react in similar circumstances."[52] In other words, Plutarch expects from his readers "intense readerly involvement … [as] an intelligent and pro-active scryer who has the responsibility to investigate the text

51 Myers gives a concise explanation of how deeds were evaluated and praised in the ancient world: "According to rhetorical handbooks and *progymnasmata*, deeds were praised: after a person's death (although not always); when the actions were done for others … and were done with 'toil' (Theon, *Prog.* 113); when the benefits of the actions were for the good of all and were long-lasting; when they were done contrary to popular expectation, or exceeding those expectations; if the person being praised acted alone or was the first of those being compared to perform such deeds; and if the person chose to act instead of being forced to act or acting by chance (Arist., *Rhet.* 1.9.14–41; Theon, *Prog.* 110–113; Quint., *Inst.* 3.7.12–18; Cic., *Top.* 69–70; Ps.-Herm., *Prog.* 16, 19; Aphth., *Prog.* 23R–25R, 30R–31R; 32R–34R; Nic., *Prog.* 52–53)." Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 91.

52 Timothy E. Duff, "Plutarch's Readers and the Moralism of the Lives," *PLOUTARCHOS* 5 (2007): 3–18 (12).

and its protagonists."[53] For example, Plutarch writes of Marius, a Roman general, who tries to regain his influence and fame in his later years by training in Campus Martius in order to show others that he is still physically fit to fight in a war:

> ***Some*** (ἐνίοις), then, were pleased to have him thus engaged, and would go down into the Campus and witness his emulation in competitive contests; but ***the better part*** (βελτίστοις) were moved to pity at the sight of his greed and ambition, because, though he had risen from poverty to the greatest wealth and from obscurity to the highest place, he knew not how to set bounds to his good fortune, and was not content to be admired and enjoy quietly what he had, but as if in need of all things, and after winning triumphs and fame.
>
> *Mar. 34.4*

Here Plutarch presents two different reactions to Marius' behaviour, and receptive readers would see that Plutarch wants his readers to agree with the opinions of "the better part," who criticise Marius for being overly obsessed with success and desire to gain praise and approval from people. Put simply, Marius' behaviour indicates his unhealthy "love for glory."[54] By defining what is honourable, namely controlling one's ambition, Plutarch persuades his readers to accept the perception of "the better part" by distancing from Marius.

John adopts a similar technique of influencing his readers in the first ten verses of ch. 3. Nicodemus is introduced as someone who seems to be an ideal candidate for the Kingdom of God, but readers soon find out that Nicodemus miserably fails to understand Jesus's words. Like Plutarch, John does not tell his readers exactly what to make of Nicodemus, but Jesus's rebuke in v. 10 clearly indicates that Nicodemus is not yet γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν and thus reveals the inadequacy of his response. Furthermore, the subtle insertion of the associative second-person plural, ὑμᾶς in v. 7 (δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν) refers not only to Nicodemus and his representative group but also to a real reader who "when reading a first person plural, inevitably finds himself included in it as well. As such, he is not only unwittingly involved more directly but also guided more firmly."[55] Though John does not intervene directly in the narrative to show what

53 Alexei V. Zadorojnyi, "ὥσπερ ἐν ἔσοπτροι: The Rhetoric and Philosophy of Plutarch's Mirrors," in *Plutarch's Lives: Parallelism and Purpose* (ed. Noreen Humble; Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2010), 169–195 (182).

54 Duff, *Exploring Virtue and Vice*, 120.

55 van Hoof, *Ethics*, 54.

is right and wrong, John narrates the story in a way that steers readers in a particular direction and thus achieves the kind of effect that one would expect from moral injunctions. In light of what we have discussed so far, the way John describes Jesus's initial encounter with Nicodemus functions rhetorically to help readers distance themselves from Nicodemus' inappropriate response and to recognise the value of γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν.

There is another important rhetorical tactic that influences readers' moral perspective, namely associating a well-known concept with a honourable historical figure in order to bring out its significance. Such a literary technique is often found in Plutarch's writings. In *Cic*. 6.1 Plutarch writes of Cicero who became a quaestor of Sicily at a time of a serious drought. Though Cicero initially irritated the people of Sicily by making them send grain to Rome during this difficult time, Cicero by being *careful*, *just* and *mild* (τῆς ἐπιμελείας καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ πραότητος αὐτοῦ) was able to regain people's respect and honour. Here Plutarch uses the commonly recognised virtues and expects his readers to approve that being a man of such virtues is a virtuous act. Furthermore, by relating those virtues with Cicero, one of Rome's greatest orators and philosophers, Plutarch tries to convince readers that one should be eager and disciplined to become *careful, just* and *mild* in one's behaviour.

Similarly, John utilises the concept of rebirth, which was well known both in the Greek and Jewish worlds,[56] in order to show that γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν is not only a virtue (in a Johannine sense) that one should try to obtain but also a requirement to enter the Kingdom of God. Though readers may not fully recognise the identity of Jesus at this point, they at least have been told that Jesus is superior to Moses, who is the greatest prophet of the Jews (1:17; 1:45; 3:14). If Jesus is indeed superior to Moses and is the source of eternal life, such rhetorical statements give readers some sort of impetus to take the experience of rebirth seriously. Here both John and Plutarch do not have to tell their readers directly what to do; yet readers are still challenged to assess their existing religious and moral worldview and are further encouraged to comply with the worldview offered by the Gospel. What becomes clear is then that "the mere narration of an event or a protagonist's action may, by the vocabulary chosen, the way it exploits well known categories, or the emphasis it receives, carry with it an implicit moral message."[57]

56 For a helpful list of ancient sources on rebirth, see Keener, *John*, 1:537–544.

57 Pelling, "Plutarch," 412.

2.4 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 16–21*

Coming to v. 16, careful readers would notice that the narrative tone changes, and scholars have proposed various suggestions as to who the speaker is. Does Jesus continue speaking even at this point or does John simply represent the interpretation of the Johannine community? Contrary to both views, I argue that the narrator takes over at v. 16 based on several reasons. First, the phrase 'the Son of Man', which is Jesus's self-designation is no longer used in vv. 16 ff. Second, the conjunction γὰρ often functions as a way of "introducing authorial comments or narrative asides in the Gospel."[58] Third, the reason why the third person pronoun is used in vv. 16 ff. instead of the first person pronoun is that it seems too premature for Jesus to deliver "these oracles of God as if he is God himself."[59] Lastly, John's Gospel is written not for the sake of Nicodemus or those who were at the scene but rather of actual readers. In fact, the promise of eternal life through belief in Jesus is especially important for real readers who are "removed from the story world of the text and no longer able to actually 'see' Jesus."[60] In other words, such narratorial comments are John's way of assuring readers how Jesus's offer to Nicodemus could also be actualised in the lives of subsequent believers. In that sense the use of the aorist tense (ἠγάπησεν, ἔδωκεν) in v. 16 should be understood as a 'gnomic' aorist, which refers not only to Nicodemus but also to a more general audience. Furthermore, the use of the present participle (ὁ πιστεύων) may also signify that the love of God is presently available for all who believe. After all, what John intends to do is not to steer Nicodemus' response but rather that of real readers. Thus vv. 16–21 is the authoritative, narratorial response to readers on why one has to be born from above by believing in Jesus and what that entails for humans.

Plutarch also often intervenes along the narrative to give a narratorial comment on a subject's character or to let readers know of the narrator's viewpoint of a subject's action.[61] For example, Plutarch writes of Alexander's pursuit of Dareius, which made all of his men exhausted and weary especially from lack of water. At that critical moment, Alexander met some Macedonians who offered him water. Despite being thirsty himself, Alexander refused to drink water and gave it rather to his horsemen who were gazing at the water. Plutarch by using the viewpoint of onlookers praises Alexander of his humble leadership: "But

58 Michaels, *John*, 200. See 4:44; 6:64; 7:5; 13:11; 20:9.

59 Michaels, *John*, 201.

60 Myers, *Characterizing Jesus*, 92.

61 Plutarch sometimes gives his personal opinions of certain actions from a first person perspective (e.g. *Ant*. 19.3; *Dem*. 22.4–7). Duff, "Critical Reader," 63.

they beheld his self-control and loftiness of spirit, and began to goad their horses on, declaring that they would not regard themselves as weary, or thirsty, or as mortals at all, so long as they had such a king" (*Alex*. 42. 10). Though it was the voice of the onlookers who gave the judgment of Alexander's action, readers are nonetheless encouraged to believe that the narrator's viewpoint also "coincides with that of such onlookers, and that they are expected to share both."[62] Likewise, John's readers are also encouraged to listen to the narrator's authorial comments (vv. 16 ff.) as to be coinciding with that of the author and are thus expected to read the whole narrative in light of the narrator's viewpoint.[63]

The *synkrisis* between Jesus and the serpent in vv. 14–15 is followed by a narratorial comment that clarifies the purpose of Jesus's coming into the world. It is interesting to see that Jesus's willingness (δεῖ)[64] to be lifted up (v. 14) is matched by the Father's willingness to send his τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ out of his love for the world (cf. 1:10–11; 1:29). Yet the offer of eternal life is not universal in a sense of 'freely given to everyone' but is guaranteed only for those who believe in Jesus for there is a condemnation awaiting those who refuse to do so (v. 17). Furthermore, the narrator explicitly depicts the notion of unbelief in a moral frame by relating unbelief to ἀπόλλυμι (v. 16) and κρίνω (vv. 17–18). The verb ἀπόλλυμι normally carries the meaning of 'destroy, ruin, or kill' but John maximises its negative nuance by putting it in juxtaposition with the phrase ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον. In John's Gospel eternal life is more than "simply the prolongation of physical life," and thus 'being lost or perished' in a Johannine sense is also more than "just physical death."[65] Similarly, the word κρίνω usually takes a meaning of 'to judge or to condemn' but since it is contrasted with σῴζω, it probably means more than simply 'judge someone' in a legal sense, but rather it is used "in the purely negative sense of reprobation, condemnation to punishment or death."[66] The warning of unbelief goes even further; those who do not believe in the name of Jesus are *already* condemned (v. 18), and the perfect

62 Duff, "Critical Reader," 66.

63 Michaels gives a similar view of what is happening in v. 16: "Without a clear notice in the text that his [Jesus's] speech is over, the reader should keep on listening as to the voice of 'the One who came down from heaven, the Son of man,' for only he can speak of 'heavenly things' (vv. 12–13)." Michaels, *John*, 201.

64 The BDAG defines δεῖ as follows: "of that which takes place because of circumstances or *inner necessity* with the context determining the cause" (italics added). In other words, Jesus takes up the cross because of his inner conviction and his love for the world.

65 Michaels, *John*, 203.

66 Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:402.

tense of κρίνω emphasises that the judgment is already[67] past.[68] Therefore, here we come to see that Nicodemus' misunderstanding, which leads to unbelief, is not a neutral act but is an act that brings the eternal condemnation of death and separation from God.

Readers up to this point may think that the cause of unbelief lies in a cognitive realm since the whole narrative is dominated by Nicodemus' misunderstanding, but in v. 19 we see another aspect of unbelief, namely, the affective side of unbelief. The narrator makes it clear in v. 19 that humans choose darkness not simply because they are dull or imperceptive in their reasoning but because they love darkness *more* (μᾶλλον) than light, and that shows that their deeds (ἔργα) are evil (πονηρα).[69] What is even more significant is that John uses the noun ἔργα in connection with unbelief three times within three verses (vv. 19–21) in order to bring out the intentional aspect of unbelief. In other words, the comparative adverb μᾶλλον along with the heavy use of ἔργα emphasises the fact that one comes to love darkness not out of ignorance but out of conscious prioritising.

Here the focus should not be just on evil deeds that one does but the narrative encourages its readers to ponder upon the nature of human condition[70]

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67 Despite a great emphasis on "believing," John also emphasises doing good deeds (5:29), which will be judged by the Son of Man at the last judgment. Regarding the notion of 'already judged', Schnackenburg rightly points out that "the present judgment does not deprive man of his further capacity to take a decision, though it can lead to hardening of his heart (9:39; 12:39), and it does not prevent God from completing his action in the future." Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:403.

68 Barrett, *John*, 217.

69 Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 87–88.

70 There are three important aspects of the human condition that results in separation from God. First, people are separated from God because they are from below (3:6; 5:26; 6:53) and those who belong to the flesh and earth have "a fundamental inability to know God and divine realities" (Craig R. Koester, "What does it mean to be human?," *Imagery*, 405–406). Second, people are separated from God due to their sins. John does not explicitly define the meaning of sin in the Gospel but Jesus's negative reactions to different characters who show misunderstanding and rejection demonstrate that "unbelief equates to sin" (Koester, "human," 407). Third, separation from God results in death. In the Gospel death implies more than mere physical death; people also "perish in a theological sense when they are completely estranged from God" (Anastasia Scrutton, "'The Truth Will Set You Free,'" 366). This statement by Scrutton clearly shows that sin in John's Gospel is a conscious decision to reject Jesus Christ (9:41; 15:22). Thus the human condition and the condition of the world in which people live can be described as follows: "As the object of God's salvation, however, the world presently stands in a state of alienation and condemnation characterized by darkness (1:5; 12:46), death (5:19–27; 8:37, 44), sin (8:21, 34), slavery (8:34–36), and falsehood (8:44). The portrayal of the world and of the human condition not only accords with what we find in the New Testament generally, but summarizes

that compels one to love darkness more than light. People do not choose darkness just because they are trapped in "a rigid and hopeless determinism,"[71] but their love for darkness distorts their affections and causes them to love and hate the wrong things.[72] Thus the dualism[73] between light and darkness in 3:19 does not refer to a cosmological dualism, but it is quite obvious that the narrator here is making a contrast in terms of moral conduct since σκότος is connected with φαῦλος, whereas φῶς is connected with ἀλήθεια.[74] As a result, the moral consequence of unbelief is clear: it results in loving the darkness and avoiding the light so that their evil deeds would not be exposed (v. 20). Such a moral reasoning prepares readers for the upcoming events where readers will see that the Jews continually misconstrued the significance and meaning of Jesus's teachings and signs, and ended up falsely judging Jesus's identity and mission because of their false love and perverted standards (6:42; 7:27; 7:41; 9:29).[75]

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and, indeed, accentuates its desperate quality" (J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, 149).

71 Morris, *John*, 207.

72 Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207. Though the cognitive aspect of unbelief is dominant in the story of Nicodemus, the affective nature of unbelief becomes stronger as the narrative develops. Even though the Jewish leaders heard Jesus's teachings and saw Jesus's signs, they hardened their hearts and directed their love to the wrong object. Painter suggests that the moral cause of unbelief is clearly seen in the Gospel mainly through three false loves the Jews show; the false love of the darkness (3:19–21), of the glory of man (5:41–44; 7:18; 8:50; 12:43), and of one's own life (12:25). John Painter, "Eschatological Faith in the Gospel of John," in *Reconciliation and Hope* (ed. Robert Banks; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1974), 36–52 (44).

73 For a helpful comparison between Greek and Jewish dualism, see Painter, "Eschatological Faith," 45.

74 Unlike the Greek and gnostic view of dualism, ethical dualism is a dominant theme both in Jewish apocalyptic and Jewish sapiential literature. Thus John's view of dualism was likely to have been influenced by the Old Testament rather than by the Greek or gnostic worldview. George Eldon Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 9–40. Cf. See also John G. Gammie, "Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature," *JBL* 93 (1974): 356–385 (372–384).

75 Despite their continual misunderstanding and unbelief, the Jews claimed to possess the life and knowledge of God, but their persecution towards Jesus and believers shows that they do not belong to God (8:42). Their false love for the wrong things as stated above confirms that "the rejection of Jesus resulted from a moral failure … and the false moral standards have a spiritual cause" (Painter, "Eschatological Faith," 45). Furthermore, the rejection of Jesus in John's Gospel is not usually passive but "issues in murderous hostility—so demonstrating the extent of their ethical deficiencies." See, Murray Hogg, *The Knowledge of God: John's Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology* (Th.M. diss.: Melbourne School of Theology, 2011), 29–30.

As unbelief results from a deliberate rejection of light, loving or coming to light should also surpass the realm of knowledge and contemplation but must be manifest in doing what is true (ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν). As seen above, Jesus does not connect φῶς with ἀγαθός (cf. 5:29) but rather with ἀλήθεια.[76] Bultmann was a major voice in advocating the Hellenistic background of ἀλήθεια in John's Gospel when he defined the terms as "divine reality … that is different from the [human] reality and that it discloses itself [as revelation]."[77] Similarly, Dodd also suggests that "ἀλήθεια in [John's] gospel rests upon common Hellenistic usage in which it hovers between the meanings of 'reality', or 'the ultimately real', and knowledge of the real."[78] However influential the position of Bultmann and Dodd may be, the notion of ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν is not found in the Hellenistic worldview since Greeks thought of truth as "something abstract, a concept of the mind."[79] Thus it would be more appropriate to understand this particular expression from the Jewish worldview in which truth carries moral connotations instead of the intellectual or philosophical ones.

The corresponding Hebrew word for ἀλήθεια is אמת, which has the meaning of 'trustworthiness' or 'steadfastness', and when אמת is used with the verb עשה, it means "to act faithfully" or "to act uprightly."[80] Similarly, in Tobit 4:6 the phrase ποιεῖν την ἀλήθειαν signifies "faithfulness to the law," and such a notion of truth as the "norm of action"[81] is prominent also in Qumran. Despite the similarity John's Gospel shares with the Jewish understanding of truth, however, John here does not simply refer only to the keeping of the law because

76 Van der Watt has a useful treatment on the usage of ἀγαθός and ἀλήθεια in John's Gospel and shows how they are used in an ethical sense. van der Watt, "Ethical Behaviour," 437–443.

77 Rudolf Bultmann, "ἀλήθεια," *TDNT*, 1: 232–251 (245).

78 van der Watt, "Reflections," 73–92.

79 Dodd, *Interpretation*, 177.

80 Lester J. Kuyper, "Grace and Truth: An Old Testament Description of God and Its Use in the Fourth Gospel," *Int* 18 (1964): 3–19 (15).

81 Dennis R. Lindsay, "What Is Truth? Ἀλήθεια in the Gospel of John," *ResQ* 35 (1993): 129–145 (134). Regarding how truth is understood by the Qumran sect, Otto Betz writes: "The truth is manifest not only in the realm of divine activity, but should also be apparent in human activity. [In the canon of the Sect] the concept *emeth* signifies the service, which God expects of humans—service which is "true" because God has commanded it. "Truth" is thoroughly practical in nature. Truth finds its expression in the commandments (1QS 1.15; 7.18); truth must be performed (1QS 1.5; 5.3; 8.2; cf. 1QH^a 6.9); truth is inseparable from "walk of life" (1QS 3.6; 4.2, 17, 20; 8.4). The proper intercourse with one's neighbor takes place according to the "standard of truth" (1QS 8.4), and the members of the Sect call themselves "men of truth" because they are "doers of the Torah" (1QpHab. 7.10–12)." Otto Betz, *Offenbarung und Schriftforschung in der Qumransekte* (WUNT 6; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960), 54 (Translation taken from Lindsay, "Truth," 134).

Jesus himself embodies God's wisdom and "serves as the full manifestation of what the Torah intended. Thus it is Jesus—not Torah alone—who shows the way to God (1:17, 14)."[82] Furthermore, John by using the term ἀλήθεια does not refer to some kind of mystical enlightenment, which ignores historical reality or ethical conduct[83] but John's usage of ἀλήθεια is predicated on the person of Jesus whose life demands concrete obedience and action.[84] In this regard, Küng writes insightfully about how ἀλήθεια should be construed in John's Gospel.[85]

> John, although using very different terminology, is speaking of the same distinctive feature as Paul when he calls Jesus the way, the truth and the life and illustrates this with images of Christ as the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the true vine, the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. Jesus here is evidently not a name, which must be constantly on our lips, but the way of life's truth, which must be practised. The truth is not something to be 'contemplated', 'theorized', but to be 'done', 'practiced'. The [Johannine] concept of truth is not—like the Greek—contemplative-theoretical, but operative-practical. It is a truth, which is not merely to be sought and found, but to be pursued, made true, verified and tested in truthfulness. A truth, which aims at practice, which calls to the way, which bestows and makes possible a new life.

As cogently argued by Küng above, the fundamental meaning of ἀλήθεια is radically redefined in John's Gospel as to bring readers to a new reality where ἀλήθεια is found only in the person of Jesus Christ. Those who have read the Gospel responsibly up to this point are already guided firmly by the author to actively respond to Jesus's invitation to rebirth, which not only shapes their understanding of Jesus's identity and mission but also challenges their existing moral values.

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82 Marianne Meye Thompson, "Thinking about God: Wisdom and Theology in John 6," in *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 221–246 (243).

83 Ignace de la Potterie, "The Truth in Saint John," in *The Interpretation of John* (ed. John Ashton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 67–82 (68–69) for a helpful list of Jewish literature on the usage of truth.

84 David J. Hawkin, "Revelation and Truth in Johannine Theology," *Chm* 116 (2002): 105–112 (109).

85 Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977), 410.

3 Reappearances of Nicodemus

The first-time reader would find the character of Nicodemus disappointing and even unworthy of any further reflection due to his continued misunderstanding and inadequate response to Jesus. Readers will soon find out, however, that Nicodemus reappears in 7:50 and 19:39 where Nicodemus is portrayed much more positively. Despite those brief reappearances, the character of Nicodemus still brings readers much confusion and uncertainty in terms of his final response to Jesus: does he finally become a disciple of Jesus or does he still remain in darkness? Unlike our excessive desire to understand the role of Nicodemus in a strict faith-unbelief dichotomy, John may have left the question of Nicodemus' destiny intentionally ambiguous, knowing rhetorical impacts such ambiguity has on readers.[86] How should readers then make sense of the figure of Nicodemus in John's Gospel or to put more explicitly, what is the intended rhetorical effect of Nicodemus' ambiguity and reappearances on readers?

As seen previously, Plutarch wanted his *Lives* to function as a mirror for his readers so that they would reflect their own lives in light of the virtues and vices of characters that they encounter in the *Lives*. Along this line of thought, Nicodemus' actions of defending Jesus in front of his fellow Pharisees (7:51) and providing a grand burial for Jesus (19:39) are certainly commendable and may incite readers to think that Nicodemus is slowly moving towards the right direction. Those who will have read through the whole Gospel would know, however, that true discipleship demands more than sympathy towards the person of Jesus but strictly requires one's personal commitment to Jesus as the Christ, Son of God (20:31). Those who see Nicodemus as having achieved adequate faith in Jesus at the end are reading too much between the lines since nowhere in the text explicitly draws such a conclusion. Then the best we can do is portray Nicodemus as someone who is progressing towards the *Light* but not fully emerged out of darkness. Due to such ambiguity, some readers might be hesitant to identify themselves with Nicodemus since, in light of the contours of Johannine faith, the response of Nicodemus is still inadequate to be counted as a genuine disciple of Jesus. Here the ambiguous nature of Nicodemus signifies complexities and challenges involved with discipleship, and also warns readers that any remaining attachment to darkness must be abandoned entirely in order for the *Light* to take over.

86 On the ambiguous nature of Nicodemus, see Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 23–40.

The more significant aspect about Nicodemus' ambiguous character is that Nicodemus' journey towards the *Light* has been left unfinished. John does not give his readers the definitive conclusion to Nicodemus' pursuit of truth and such open-endedness invites readers to complete the journey that is left undone by Nicodemus. Readers who have read up to ch. 19 have seen that true disciples must undergo radical transformations cognitively and behaviourally. John's descriptions of Nicodemus, however, fall short of such radicalness that Johannine discipleship requires. Readers, who have read up to this point of narrative where Jesus was buried generously by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, soon realise that Jesus's death is not an end to his salvific mission but is rather followed by Jesus's resurrection which initiates another mission (20:21). This new mission, as will be made clear, will need to be taken up not by Jesus this time, but by the disciples who will be empowered by the Spirit to preach the forgiveness of sins (20:23) and to shepherd the sheep (21:15–18) entrusted by Jesus. In light of this larger context, readers come to recognise the inadequacy of Nicodemus' endeavour to follow Jesus, and thus readers are encouraged or even mandated to go further in their journey of discipleship in order to fill in the gaps, which have been left unfilled by Nicodemus who lingers around the periphery of darkness.

4 Conclusion

An ethical reading of the Nicodemus narrative has shown that John writes his narrative in a similar manner to Plutarch so that the force of his ethical perspective emerges directly (though often implicitly) from the story itself through various literary devices "rather than to be imposed on it from outside."[87] Through the Nicodemus narrative, John leads his readers to challenge and reconsider their moral assumptions and to accept the Johannine understanding of 'what is ethical'. To do so, John does not give readers a list of 'dos or don'ts' but he rather presents them with a story that is aimed at persuading its readers to adopt a Johannine worldview (flesh versus spirit; earthly versus heavenly; Moses versus Jesus; darkness versus light; judgment versus life) and thus to walk in the way of Johannine discipleship. In fact, it is in the Nicodemus narrative that readers begin to discover what is at stake in following and rejecting Jesus, and what one must do in order to join the community of faith (rebirth). As seen in the previous chapter, it is imperative for anyone to go through some form of conversion

87 Duff, "Critical Reader," 66.

in order to make meaningful progress in moral transformation. It is no coincidence then that John placed the Nicodemus narrative strategically early on in the Gospel in order to give the theological basis for discipleship.

As the first major encounter story in this Gospel, the Nicodemus narrative functions as a base camp from which readers can take the fundamental Johannine moral perspectives or rationale that will be foundational to understanding John's overall moral framework; a high density of moral terms found in the Nicodemus narrative indicates such an intention on the part of the author. Though various ethical terms are imbedded throughout this narrative, all these terms work together to point readers to one essential ethical truth, that is one's coming to Jesus (light) is closely related to one's being moral. Put differently, John does not believe that one becomes a moral being by doing simply what is acceptable according to the law but by first coming to the light (Jesus) that dispels darkness which is the source of all evil (3:19). Those who come to light are the ones who distinguish themselves from the ones in darkness by 'doing what is true'. Despite the lack of direct ethical injunctions, readers begin to be challenged in terms of their ethical assumptions, and such a Johannine way of moralising can only be properly understood and appreciated when readers are familiar with some of the basic characteristics of ancient narratives and its techniques. With the ethical framework gained from the Nicodemus story, we will see how John continues to develop his moral vision in the story of the Samaritan woman.

CHAPTER 4

Reading the Story of the Samaritan Woman Ethically

In the previous chapter, it has become clear that John takes his mode of discourse seriously, and thus instead of using explicit ethical statements, John uses various literary devices to transform readers' moral worldview through effecting one's understanding of the identity of Jesus and the purpose of his ministry. Such a transformation in worldview prepares readers to think, reason and finally behave in a way that reflects their convictions and beliefs in Jesus. As seen previously, belief in Jesus carries ethical implications since true conversion in a Johannine sense is always accompanied by a complete transition of oneself from darkness to light (3:19), whereas whoever hates the light (Jesus) is put on the equal footing with those who do wicked things (3:20). In this respect, Christology and ethics intersect in John's Gospel.

Though readers have learned a great deal in terms of Jesus's identity and origin through the Nicodemus narrative, they still do not fully understand at this point of the narrative what it means or what it requires of them to participate in a life-long journey of discipleship. The readers who come to the story of the Samaritan woman for the first time may jump to (negative) conclusions about the outcome of this story because Nicodemus who seems most qualified in terms of scriptural learning has already failed to appreciate and understand the teachings of Jesus and the significance of Jesus's offer and ministry. Such a gloomy outlook only gets exacerbated by John's disciples' complaint about Jesus baptising more than their own teacher (3:26)—"Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptising, and all are going to him." Though John has been publicly proclaiming Jesus's superiority over himself in 1:15, 1:26–27 and 1:30, John's disciples are needlessly worried that their master would lose popularity among the crowd and thus theirs too.[1]

1 Neyrey examines 3:30 in light of the ancient cultural model of "limited good" and how the concept of "limited good" is closely related to envy. His analysis of the passage concludes that John's disciples' controversy over purification results from their envious reaction towards Jesus and such a reaction is derived from understanding the situation in terms of "limited good" by which they perceive Jesus's increasing reputation as threat to their ministry and fame. Jerome H. Neyrey, "He Must Increase, I Must Decrease (John 3:30): A Cultural and Social Interpretation," in *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 123–142.

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The context makes it quite clear that John's disciples' complaint arises out of their envy for Jesus's increasing honour compared to their master's decreasing fame. If they had been Jesus's true friends (3:29), they would have rejoiced over Jesus's increasing reputation, but their love for their own fame has blinded their eyes to the truth and the gift Jesus has brought to them.

Such an interpretation is paralleled by how Plutarch writes of envy that is especially targeted at those who are successful even from the beginning of their public career. When someone gets popularity and fame early in his public career, men tend to refuse him access to the orator's platform "as though they were depriving themselves of so much of these [fame and respect] as they grant to others" (*An seni* 787D). In other words, people easily get jealous when someone gets public attention at an early age or early in his career. In fact, that is exactly what readers discover in John 3:22–30; John's disciples are envious of Jesus because he baptises more than John does even though Jesus's ministry began later than that of their master. Since those (Nicodemus and John's disciples) who should know better end up not knowing at all, readers' expectation of finding a good model of faith is heightened and at this critical point readers are introduced to the Samaritan woman[2] who seems to be the most unsuitable character to meet the readers' expectations. The rhetorical effect of positioning the story at this point of the narrative is significant for readers because John may have wanted his readers to approach the story with an attitude, 'can anything good come out of Samaria?' (cf. 1:46).

1 Ethical Reading of the Samaritan Woman

1.1 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 1–4*

The story begins with a particle, οὖν, which links this particular pericope to Jesus's baptismal ministry in the previous chapter. Here John tells readers why Jesus has decided to leave Judea for Galilee; the Pharisees have found out that Jesus was baptising more than John. Readers have already read in 1:19 that the Jewish leaders had sent priests and Levites to investigate John's credentials, and in 4:1 readers realise that Jesus is the Jews' next target. Though the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus is not hostile yet, the context makes it clear that there is an increasing tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. With a minor editorial comment in v. 2, John clarifies that it was not Jesus but his disciples

2 For the literary analysis of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman as a gender pair, see Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (JSNTSup 242; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 67–102.

who actually performed the activity of baptising. Such a statement seems to contradict the previous passages (3:22, 26), where Jesus himself was said to baptise. It may be that it was in fact not Jesus who baptised in 3:32 and 26 but rather it was John's "shorthand for the disciples baptizing."[3] Though the historicity of 3:33, 26 cannot be verified, the editorial comment in 4:2 achieves one important rhetorical effect, that is highlighting Jesus's superiority over John the Baptist.[4] It has been already made clear in the previous chapter that it is not water but spirit that causes one to be born again (3:6) and thus "[water] baptism itself does not *cause* one to believe or become a disciple"[5] but simply recognises a person publicly of having faith in Jesus. In other words, the narrator makes a clear distinction between an initiatory rite performed by John the Baptist and the disciples and a real saving work performed by Jesus. Here readers see John's continued effort early on in the Gospel to present Jesus as superior to other well-known historical figures (e.g. Moses and John the Baptist) in order to underscore the fact that Jesus is greater than what they deem him to be.

John then goes on to describe Jesus's itinerary in 4:4 that would be quite disturbing to readers who share the view of the Pharisees on Samaria.[6] It is not obvious why Jesus took the route he did in 4:4, but two dominant positions exist; the one is geographical and the other is theological. Those who support the geographical reason argue that Jesus took this route simply because it was the shortest way to Galilee.[7] On the other hand, those who support the theological interpretation suggest that the verb δεῖ carries "the notion of necessity"[8] and thus it is according to the divine will that Jesus had to pass through Samaria.[9] Though John does not explicitly state why Jesus had to go through Samaria to get to Galilee, such topographical information seems to indicate more than the historiographical features of the Gospel[10] but often highlights theological sig-

3 Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John* (BNTC 4; New York: Continuum, 2005), 171.

4 Though the title "John the Baptist" is not found in John's Gospel, I use it in order to make a distinction between John the author and John the Baptist.

5 Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1–42* (WUNT II/31; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 82.

6 The Jews' remark in 8:48 certainly points to their negative view of the Samaritans.

7 Bultmann, *John*, 176; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 178; Schnackenburg, *John*, I:422.

8 Okure, *Mission*, 85. Cf. 3:14.

9 Brown, *John*, 1:169; Morris, *John*, 226; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 116.

10 Richard Bauckham, "Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John," *NTS* 53 (2007): 17–36 (19–24).

nificance as well. For example, it appears quite intentional on the part of John to mention two places, Judea and Galilee at the beginning of this narrative (4:3) because a conscious distinction has been made between these two places from the beginning of the Gospel.[11]

In 1:44 Philip, Andrew, Peter, and especially Nathanael who makes an extraordinary confession ("You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49)) are said to be from Bethsaida in Galilee and function as "paradigms of Galilean faith."[12] In the Cana episode, the first sign also results in positive response from the disciples by believing in Jesus (2:11), and after the wedding, Jesus decides to remain (μένω)[13] at Capernaum (in Galilee) for a few days (2:12). The narrative, however, takes a sharp turn in 2:13, which takes place in the land of Judea. Unlike the faithful response that Jesus received in Galilee, readers soon discover the there is a great tension between Jesus and the Jews in Jerusalem.[14] The narrator describes explicitly that Jesus by driving out merchants and money changers and overturning the tables, formally condemns the Jews' perverted use of the temple. Jesus's behaviour in the temple, however, does not only shock both readers and the Jews at the scene but also shatters their status quo because the temple was the central institution for Jewish religious, economic, and sociopolitical life.

Furthermore, discrediting the activities within the temple was as disturbing as denigrating the Jews' very identity and belief. Though Jesus's anger was directed specifically towards the *misuse* of the temple, his prediction of the destruction of the temple and of his forthcoming resurrection implies that the Jerusalem temple is no longer the locus of God's presence on earth because Jesus himself will replace that temple (2:18–22). In other words, the temple, which was supposed to be the place of holiness and sanctity,[15] is ironically criticised as the οἶκον ἐμπορίου, and the misunderstanding of Nicodemus, who is the Jewish leader from Jerusalem, only further augments this negative

11 I think Bassler is right to note that the distinction is not strictly made in terms of geographical location but in terms of a class of people. In other words, people are not classified as *Ioudaioi* necessarily "by their land of origin or habitation but by their response to Jesus." Jouette M. Bassler, "The Galileans: A Neglected Factor in Johannine Community Research," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 243–257 (254).

12 Bassler, "Galileans," 246.

13 Though μένω at this point refers to Jesus's lodging, readers will realise that "the term gradually assumes a significant metaphorical dimension in John (cf. 8:31; 14:10, 17; 15:4–10)." Köstenberger, *John*, 74–75.

14 Some scholars see this particular episode as one of Jesus's signs. See Robert T. Fortna, "Theological Use of Locale in the Fourth Gospel" in *Gospel Studies in Honor of Sherman E. Johnson* (eds. Massey H. Shepherd Jr. and E.C. Hobbs; AThR 3; Evanston, 1974), 58–95 (66, n. 29).

15 E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 70–76.

view of Judea. Thus a clear contrast between Judea and Galilee has already become obvious for readers in chs. 2 and 3, and John may want his readers to possess such a symbolic understanding of Judea and Galilee beforehand in order to maximise the rhetorical effect of the story of the Samaritan woman on his readers.

1.2 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 5–15*

In v. 5 the narrator provides additional topographical information, which locates Jesus's whereabouts in a town of Samaria called Sychar, home of Jacob's well. Such a detailed description of a place has two rhetorical functions for readers: first, the exact name of the town in v. 5 assures readers that the Samaritan woman's remark about Jacob later in v. 12 is indeed credible and accurate. Second, using the name Samaria twice at the beginning of the discourse (vv. 4–5) draws the readers' attention to the fact that Jesus has now "entered alien, profane[16] territory."[17] John, however, overturns such a predominant view of Samaria by describing Judea as a place where Jesus must leave (ἀφίημι, 4:3) for safety and Samaria as a place where Jesus can sit (καθέζομαι, 4:6) and rest without facing any conflict.[18] It is crucial to note that Judea is portrayed less favourably than not only Galilee but also Samaria. This negative portrayal of Judea challenges the readers' conception of what is holy and culturally acceptable since Samaria is thought to be occupied by those who are considered to be unholy and culturally incompatible according to Jewish tradition and yet is portrayed more positively than Judea. In other words, what seems to be a trivial narratorial comment offers readers a clear moralism that subverts the readers' existing moral worldview.

John goes on to tell readers that Jesus was weary (κοπιάω) from the journey and that it was around noon (ἕκτη)[19] when he sat beside the well (4:7).

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16 The woman's remark in v. 9 signals an obvious dissonance between the Jews and the Samaritans. Novakovic argues that the description of the Samaritans in NTS is heavily influenced by Jewish perspectives and based on the evidence that "is frequently ambiguous and inconsistent." Lidija Novakovic, "Jews and Samaritans," in *The World of the New Testament* (eds. Joel Green and Lee Martin McDonald; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 207–216 (212).

17 Winsome Munro, "The Pharisee and the Samaritan in John: Polar or Parallel?," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 710–728 (714).

18 Similarly, Fortna also argues that "not only is [Jesus] safe in Samaria from official Jewish pursuit, just as in Galilee (4:1), but the reception he gains from the Samaritans (verse 40) parallels that from the Galileans (verse 45)." Fortna, "Locale," 83.

19 Walker argues that the sixth hour would be 6 pm according to the modern method, which he believes John has used. See Norman Walker, "The Reckoning of Hours in the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 4 (1960): 69–73.

It may be surprising for some readers to find out that a woman comes to draw water in the middle of the day when the sun is most fierce, let alone that she came by herself. Many commentators have often proposed that the Samaritan woman came to the well deliberately at the hottest time of the day to avoid contact with other women due to her shameful marital history, which would have made her unfit or a subject of gossip among her townswomen. Nowhere in the text, however, is such a reading implied since neither Jesus nor the narrator makes any moral judgments regarding her marital status.[20] Instead of reading too much into the text, another plausible explanation for the timing of the woman's visit to the well is that John may have used the day as a symbolic meaning to create a contrast between Nicodemus/darkness/Judea versus the Samaritan woman/light/Samaria.[21]

Such an interpretation is not out of context in light of the way Plutarch describes the role of women in his biographies. Though Plutarch generally supports the traditional view of male priority, he sometimes puts forward the female characters when men are incapacitated or incapable of practicing virtues in times of crisis.[22] In *Mulier. virt.* Plutarch writes of Aristodemus, who as a tyrant forced the citizens to build a moat all the way round the country for no other reason than simply for wasting their strength with toils and labours. While both men and women were labouring at this task, one woman, when she saw Aristodemus approaching, covered her face with her garment. When her fellow men asked her why she covered her face in front of Aristodemus, she replied, "Because among all the people of Cumae, Aristodemus is the only man!" (*Mulier. virt.* 262B). With these few words, the woman shamed her own countrymen into fighting for their freedom, and the city of Cumae was finally made free by the bravery of the woman. John may have used the Samaritan woman in a similar way because Nicodemus and John's disciples have already failed to function as a virtuous model for readers, and now he is using a female character purposefully to show not only the radical inclusiveness of Jesus's ministry but also the rhetorical effect of using the Samaritan woman as the one who truly understands Jesus's message (this will become clearer later on).

20 Beirne, *Equals*, 82 (n. 64).

21 Cf. Mary Margaret Pazdan, "Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Models of Discipleship," *BTB* 17 (1987): 145–148.

22 Jeremy McInerney, "Plutarch's Manly Women," in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity* (eds. Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 319–344 (326, 337).

What surprises readers at this point of narrative is Jesus's behaviour toward the woman at the well because Jesus approaches her and says, "Give me a drink (4:7)."[23] Jesus's action is inappropriate for two reasons: the person Jesus is approaching is a Samaritan and moreover a woman. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus was at the well alone (v. 8) when he spoke to her made the whole situation even more improper in light of the ancient custom regarding gender division.[24] It was not only gender division that was being violated by Jesus, however, but also ethnic division; "How is it that you, a *Jew*, ask for a drink from me, a *woman* of *Samaria*?" (For Jews have no dealings (συγχράομαι)[25] with Samaritans.)[26] It is important to note that her understanding of Jesus as a Jew is only half right because Nathanael has already made clear the identity of Jesus as the Son of

23 Many commentators argue that John 4:3–42 resembles the betrothal type–scene of which the prime example is the meeting between Abraham's servant and Rebekah in Gen. 24:10–61. Contrary to this widely accepted view, Arterbury argues that one does not have to rely on the betrothal narrative in order to make sense of the story. Instead, he insists that the ancient custom of hospitality can provide a better hermeneutical framework for the interaction between Jesus and the woman. Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 63–83.

24 It was common in the ancient Mediterranean world that women should be prohibited from speaking to a strange man. Furthermore, there was a clear gender division in terms of space and labour that women were restricted to private space doing household tasks, whereas men belonged to public space doing public tasks such as ploughing or sowing. For a helpful treatment on ancient cultural expectations towards women, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "What is Wrong with This Picture?: John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space," *BTB* 24 (1994): 77–91. Regarding women speaking in public, Plutarch comments: "And so their women, it is said, were too bold, putting on men's airs with their husbands even, to begin with, since they ruled their houses absolutely, and besides, on public occasions, taking part in debate and the freest speech on the most important subjects. But Numa, while carefully preserving to the matrons that dignified and honourable relation to their husbands which was bestowed on them by Romulus … enjoined great modesty upon them, forbade them all busy intermeddling, taught them sobriety, and accustomed them to be silent; wine they were to refrain from entirely, and were not to speak, even on the most necessary topics, unless their husbands were with them" (*Comp. Lyc. Num.*, 3.5).

25 The meaning of συγχράομαι is disputed among scholars. Does it simply mean "to use" or more broadly "to associate on friendly terms"? Daube argues that the latter meaning is not found in the contemporary literature and thus concludes that it should mean "to use (vessels) together with" the Samaritans. The meaning of the narratorial comment is not significantly misrepresented either way—the main point the readers should know is that Jesus's behaviour is against the conventional norm of Jewish customs. David Daube, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of συγχράομαι," *JBL* 69 (1950): 137–147.

26 The narratorial comment at the end of v. 9 explains why the woman is surprised by Jesus's action and such additional information would be helpful for those who may not be well acquainted with the Jewish relation with the Samaritans.

God and the King of Israel (1:48). More importantly, Jewish ethnicity alone does not determine Jesus's identity, because as seen previously in the temple incident (2:14–16) Jesus is not bound by Jewish religious traditions but rather has the authority to condemn what is approved by the Jews. In other words, Jesus is not interested in whether a person is a Jew or a Samaritan but only in whether a person is a child of God (born again) or not. Thus the ethnic stigma on the Samaritans neither matters to nor bothers Jesus at all because Jesus does not judge a person based on one's physical lineage but rather on a spiritual one (1:12–13; 3:5).

Here in order to see the ethical value of Jesus approaching the woman and asking for water, readers must understand that for ancient writers, "character was itself conceived of in essentially moral terms,"[27] and authors who write in narrative would tend to reveal his or her ethical stance not so much by telling but by showing. Put differently, as seen in the story of Nicodemus, instead of directly *telling* readers what to do or how to behave in certain situations, ancient writers such as Plutarch *show* their moral insights in a way that readers can recognise such ethical implications without being told explicitly. In a comparable manner, by describing Jesus as approaching the Samaritan woman first and asking for water, John shows and redefines the meaning of neighbour and even challenges Jewish traditions, which view the Samaritans as ill-assorted with the Jews.

The story then takes a somewhat unexpected turn as Jesus responds (4:10) to the woman's straightforward question (4:9) in a perplexing manner (cf. 3:3). Such a seemingly irrelevant answer from Jesus, however, appears to be intentional as seen in the previous chapter and reveals that like Nicodemus the woman also misunderstands Jesus primarily on two points: one is Jesus's identity and the other is what Jesus can do for her. As much as Nicodemus' understanding of Jesus is limited by his religious traditions, the woman's understanding of Jesus is also restricted and dominated by the issue of enmity between Samaria and Judea. Jesus's reply in v. 10 shows that Jesus's interest in the Samaritan woman and in humans more generally does not lie simply in earthly matters such as man-made traditions or ethnic (cultural) biases but rather lies in a much deeper issue, namely, their spiritual status. Though Jesus is physically thirsty from his long walk at the moment, his physical thirst can wait because there is a more urgent matter that demands Jesus's immediate attention. In a way, Jesus's reply signals that not all issues are equally important but Jesus rather assigns different degrees of importance to different issues among which a person's possession of τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ (4:10) is most essential and urgent.

27 Duff, "Critical Reader," 65.

Here Jesus makes an explicit connection between 'the gift of God' and 'knowing the giver'.[28] In other words, one must know who has the authority to give such a gift in order to receive it. Readers at this point may see that there are also degrees of importance in terms of ethical deed. For example, the woman's question in v. 9 is certainly an ethical one since her remark is concerned with the issue of religious purity.[29] Jesus's response in v. 10, however, also carries ethical implications since it has been already made clear in the previous chapter that coming to Jesus has decisive ethical consequences (3:20). Then what readers can perceive from this first part of the exchange between Jesus and the woman is that knowing "the gift of God" is a far more crucial ethical deed than keeping man-made customs. Thus from early on in the narrative, John is deliberately working his way into readers' mind to give them a new ethical standard that may be contrary to what they are accustomed.

It is quite evident that the woman's response in v. 11, which includes the words ἄντλημα and βαθύς shows that she is still confused as to what Jesus means by ὕδωρ ζῶν, and thus the woman's addressing of Jesus as κύριε certainly does not carry a christological connotation at this point as seen in 3:2. Furthermore, the difference in the vocabulary for the well signifies that Jesus and the woman talk about different kinds of water. The woman uses φρέαρ (4:11–12), which refers to the man-made well such as a cistern or shaft, whereas Jesus uses πηγή (4:14), which refers to a spring of water.[30] It is not coincidental that the narrator also uses πηγή in 4:6, and such a shared knowledge between Jesus and the narrator is a subtle but an effective rhetorical tactic to encourage readers to engage the narrative as an insider. Readers can now see that the perceptions of both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are very different from that of Jesus; their conversation with Jesus is like parallel lines that never intersect.

The woman's sustained misunderstanding finally leads her to doubt whether Jesus is someone who is worthy of having any further conversation. To assess Jesus's credentials, the woman asks Jesus a question, which in her opinion

28 Jesus makes a clear link between "the gift of God" and "living water" though its exact meaning is disputed among scholars. Living water here obviously does not refer to running water from streams but it rather carries a metaphorical meaning, which may refer to the law (1:17), Jesus himself (3:16) or the Spirit (3:34). Though it was not the giving of the law for which Jesus came to this world, the woman would have known to whom she was talking had she known the law properly. Michaels, *John*, 241.

29 The Samaritan women were considered perpetual menstruants and thus the Jews would not have dared to share something with a Samaritan woman who would have been deemed ritually impure (cf. *m. Nid.* 4:1). J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Samaritan Woman's Purity," *EvQ* 60 (1988): 291–298 (295–296).

30 Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, 79.

must be answered by Jesus negatively: μὴ σὺ[31] μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰακώβ; Jesus does not directly answer the question as in v. 10, but shows his superiority over Jacob indirectly by comparing the kind of water he gives to that which Jacob gave. The difference is straightforward; the water Jesus gives has the power of quenching (spiritual) thirst completely, whereas the water from Jacob's well cannot give its drinkers a permanent solution to thirst. More importantly, Jesus's water does not have to be drawn from the well but it has an endless supply of living water that results in eternal life.[32] Readers now know that ὕδωρ ζῶν refers to ζωὴν αἰώνιον (4:14), and it is that gift of eternal life that makes Jesus superior to Jacob since despite its abundance (4:12), the Jacob's well could not completely solve the problem of both physical and spiritual thirst for generations. The use of αὐτῷ in v. 14 seems quite deliberate since the purpose of the Gospel is to lead readers to saving faith in Jesus and thus the use of the masculine pronoun has the rhetorical power of moving "the center of attention away from her and the scene at the well, as if to say to the reader, male or female."[33] Jesus's offer of living water is then extended not only to the woman but to all who read and hear this Gospel, and Jesus's superiority over Moses (3:14) and here over Jacob adds weight and even urgency to that offer. The woman's continued misunderstanding, however, shows that she is not yet ready to receive the living water from Jesus, and the role of giver is now reversed and is assigned to Jesus in the following verses.[34]

1.3 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 16–30*

In v. 16 Jesus caught the woman off guard by asking her to bring her husband, and such a seemingly extraneous request shows that it is time for Jesus to help the woman move forward in her understanding of his identity. At this point, most commentators conclude that the Samaritan woman is immoral based on the fact that she has had multiple marriages and that she now lives with a man who is not her husband. Does the story provide enough hints as to judge the woman's moral integrity? Recent research on marriage and divorce customs in the ancient Near Eastern world shows that it is possible for the Samaritan woman to have such a complex marital history and yet not to be stigmatised

31 The particle μὴ and the emphatic use of σὺ show the woman's confidence of Jesus's inferiority to Jacob. Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 70.

32 Okure gives a helpful list of differences between Jesus's water and the water from Jacob's well on three aspects: its function, its location and accessibility, and its natural and intrinsic quality. Okure, *Mission*, 101–106.

33 Michaels, *John*, 243–244.

34 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 72.

or considered promiscuous by her townspeople.[35] Furthermore, the fact that the villagers later accept the woman's testimony about Jesus (4:39) seems to indicate that the woman is neither despised nor considered a moral outcast by the townspeople.[36] Despite the dominant negative view towards the woman in modern Johannine scholarship, the purpose of revealing the woman's marital history is not so much condemning the woman's sinful lifestyle[37] as revealing himself as an authority who deserves her attention and trust (cf. 1:48). The fact that Jesus knows the details of her past life shows that he was also aware of such facts when he first saw her at the well. That does not, however, hinder Jesus from approaching her and even from offering the gift of God.

Readers, by comparing the way Jesus treats Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, can easily learn that Jesus does not show favouritism to anyone based on whether the person is learned or unlearned, a Jew or a Gentile, a man or a woman, happily married or divorced. In fact, Jesus's encounter with various characters so far have shown that his ultimate interest in a person goes beyond mere knowledge of one's moral history but is primarily directed to a much more profound issue of whether a person has access to living water or not. In light of such a narrative focus, Jesus's request to bring her husband is not meant to uncover her moral guilt but functions more as a rhetorical statement to "move the dialogue to its next phase."[38] The woman's reply that she does not have a husband[39] is confirmed to be true by Jesus, and the woman slowly begins to come to her senses regarding the identity of Jesus after witnessing Jesus's supernatural knowledge. Her perception (θεωρέω)[40] of Jesus as a prophet in v. 19 is not yet completely correct but is certainly moving into the right direction.

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35 Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 122–128.

36 This is not to say that Jesus condones the woman's marital history as acceptable but that one should not unduly draw out ethical implications from vv. 17–18.

37 Jo Ann Davidson, "John 4: Another Look at the Samaritan Woman," *AUSS* 4 (2005): 159–168 (165–166).

38 Lee, *Symbolic Narratives*, 69.

39 The fact that the woman has had the five husbands has been understood both allegorically and literally. The former view sees the husbands as foreign gods in light of the Old Testament's way of describing false worship in terms of infidelity to a husband. This particular view has been well discredited by Thettayil, and I also believe that it is more fitting to understand the five husbands literally here. See Benny Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth: An Exegetical Study of John 4:19–26 and a Theological Investigation of the Replacement Theme in the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 33–41.

40 Here the woman's perception refers to "an intellectual perception of a fact, not a spiritual insight into meaning, for which notion the Evangelist usually employs the perfect of ὁράω (1:34; 3:11, 32; 19:35)." Okure, *Mission*, 113.

The narrative offers another interesting twist in v. 20 since the woman abruptly changes the topic of conversation to the place of worship. Though some commentators find such a transition uncomfortable, one should understand that the text is written in a dialogue form not in a systematic treaty, which means that "there are no set rules as to what may or may not come into a conversation."[41] After all, what topic could be more fitting than the issue of the sacred place if she thought of Jesus as a Jewish prophet? The way she puts the question, however, still shows that she does not fully understand who Jesus is. Instead of using the first person singular, the woman uses the plural pronoun (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) to emphasise her connection to the Patriarchs in order to make her mountain the legitimate centre for worship, whereas she almost seems to deliberately use a simple plural pronoun ὑμεῖς for Jesus as if the legitimacy of Jerusalem is not founded upon such traditions. To her surprise, Jesus endorses none of the sites for proper worship, and even more surprisingly Jesus even calls God the Father (4:21). Readers know the significance of the term Father for Jesus as early as from the Prologue (1:18), and "by repetition and juxtaposition John has ironically shown that the Samaritan woman has no idea who the Father is."[42]

Though Jesus has been very gentle with the woman so far even by calling her γύναι,[43] his remark takes a somewhat blunt tone when it comes to pointing out her spiritual ignorance; ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε (4:22).[44] As seen in the Nicodemus narrative, when it comes to an issue of importance, Jesus does not let his counterpart easily get away. Jesus's use of the plural (ὑμεῖς) to address the woman in v. 22 echoes not only the woman's previous use of the plural in v. 20 (ὑμεῖς λέγετε) but also signifies that her relation to her Patriarchs alone cannot be the adequate basis of true worship. Unlike the woman's ignorance, Jesus affirms that he and his believers worship what they know (ἡμεῖς προσκυνοῦμεν ὃ οἴδαμεν), and the use of the first plural pronoun seems to function as an inclusive technique, which invites readers to share the experience of either Jesus or the narrator. Here the only way both readers and the

41 Okure, *Mission*, 114.

42 Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 69.

43 Jesus has already used γυνή to address his mother in 2:4, and such a positive use of the term is also implied here since it was a common way of addressing a woman politely in Koine Greek. Lindars, *John*, 188; J.P. Louw et al., eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:108.

44 It is well-known that the Samaritans only upheld the Torah as God's authoritative scriptures and thus did not know about God who was revealed in the Psalms and the prophets. Such a partial knowledge was not adequate to know God fully as revealed in the subsequent history of Israel.

woman can properly worship is to know what Jesus knows and that the salvation is from (ἐκ) the Jews (4:22).[45] Whether ἐκ here should be rendered 'of' or 'from' is still disputed. The former view proposes that the salvation belongs to the Jews, whereas the latter view argues that salvation originates from the Jews. For our purpose, it is sufficient to note that the fact that Jesus came to Samaria and interacts with the Samaritan woman shows that the salvation is not only restricted to the Jews but also is available to all the people who believe in Jesus. Carson has put it well in regard to this matter: "… as the Jews stand within the stream of God's saving revelation, so can it be said that they are the vehicle of the revelation, the historical matrix out of which that revelation emerges."[46]

V. 23 begins with the conjunction ἀλλά, which signals that what follows will provide "a totally new perspective from which to view the question of worship."[47] In fact, Jesus no longer uses woman's categories but uses his own terms in order to help the woman understand the kind of worship that God seeks.[48] As seen previously, it is no longer the place of worship that matters but the manner in which one worships is what Jesus wants the woman to grasp. Jesus's cleansing of the temple in ch. 2 has already made evident that the Jews have corrupted the temple by making the house of worship into the house of merchandise, and such an incident readies readers for a teaching like this which would sound otherwise incredibly radical for those who have not been introduced to an idea of "an internal, spiritualized worship."[49]

Jesus gives the woman two important facts about true worship; one is 'when' and the other is 'how'. Regarding the former, Jesus seems to emphasise both the futuristic (ἔρχεται ὥρα) and present (νῦν ἐστιν) aspects of worship; despite the eschatological nature of worship, the woman can worship in a proper manner even now because one's present relationship with Jesus makes such worship

45 This is one of the few verses that describes "the Jews" in a positive way. For neutral and positive connotations of the Jews, see Lars Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT II/97; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 63–110. Furthermore, the mentioning of the "Jews" also creates the cognitive possibility for the woman that Jesus as a Jewish prophet could even be the Messiah that she has been waiting for. J. Eugene Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman; A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1–42* (NovTSup LXV; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 146–147.

46 Carson, *John*, 223–224.

47 O'Day, *Revelation*, 70.

48 The verb ζητέω here signifies that gathering those who would worship him in spirit and truth is God's ultimate purpose of sending his Son into the world (3:16), and such a desire on the part of God is shared by the Son Jesus (5:19). Barrett, *John*, 238.

49 O'Day, *Revelation*, 70.

possible.[50] Jesus then clarifies 'how'; since God is spirit,[51] it is only through spirit and truth that one's worship becomes acceptable to God. Unlike the woman, readers have been introduced to terms like πνεῦμα (1:32–33; 3:5–6, 8) and ἀλήθεια (1:14, 17; 3:21) along the way and thus could see that this new mode of worship is no longer based on geography or man-made rituals or traditions but rather on one's being born from above and practicing what is true by believing in Jesus. In other words, if true worship requires one to know fully who the Father is, it is only through Jesus that such worship becomes possible because Jesus is the only one who can reveal the Father to humans (1:18).

The woman's increased understanding leads her to make an even greater remark about Jesus; οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός (4:25). The woman still speaks in terms of the future (ἔρχεται) but the level of the woman's understanding finally reaches the point where Jesus reveals who he really is; ἐγώ εἰμι,[52] ὁ λαλῶν σοι (4:26; cf. 6:20). Though it is still disputed whether the expression ἐγώ εἰμι here denotes Jesus's divine status, at least from the readers' perspective, the expression "points to his role as the one in whom the divine promises of revelation and salvation are being fulfilled."[53] If that is the case, readers may find Jesus's utterance astonishing since Jesus reveals his divine identity for the first time "on Samaritan soil in front of a Samaritan woman."[54] After Jesus's self-declaration of his identity, the woman no longer speaks in the first person plural but rather in the first person singular, and such a move may reflect that the woman now sees herself as a thirsty human being who longs for living water, and that is the kind of attitude that Nicodemus and other Jews lack. In other words, if she thought that her relation to her forefathers is still important, she would have uttered the remark in the first person plural but an obvious distancing from the forefathers may indicate that she begins to realise

50 The tension between the present hour and the coming hour may be due to the fact that John writes in a different time than the narrative time. In other words, John writes this particular verse in a way that makes sense not only to the woman but also to the reader. Thettayil, *In Spirit*, 111–112.

51 Readers may refer back to 1:18 where God is said to be invisible and thus must be spirit whose presence is only known through his incarnate son Jesus.

52 At the narrative level, such a claim by Jesus "confirms the narrator's conceptual point of view," which is to be shared by the readers as well. David Mark Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications* (JSNTSup 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 67.

53 Catrin H. Williams, *I am He* (WUNT II/113; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 266 where Williams also argues that the expression "[intentionally] remains an enigmatic expression … [subject to] different levels of interpretation at this point."

54 Michaels, *John*, 256.

that it takes more than the knowledge of 'where to worship' in order to acquire the gift that Jesus has been advocating all along.

As the disciples come back from the town, they are almost disturbed (θαυμάζω)[55] to see Jesus talking to a woman, and the narrator spells out what they are thinking in their mind: τί ζητεῖς ἢ τί λαλεῖς μετ᾽ αὐτῆς; The readers not only know the answers to those questions but also realise how absurd their questions are since it has already become obvious that man-made ethnic or gender boundaries are of no significance to Jesus, and furthermore, the right to become the children of God is available to everyone who believes in the name of Jesus (1:12). The woman even before being commissioned by Jesus instinctively knows what to do next and runs to the town to tell her townspeople about the man who told her everything she did, leaving her water jar (ὑδρία) behind (cf. 20:18). Many commentators have tried to expose the symbolical meaning of the woman's action of leaving the water pot behind, even suggesting the woman's intention to break away from her old life. Such a reading may require one to read too much into the text, however, since the woman still shows her uncertainty in her subsequent remark; μήτι[56] οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός; It is thus contextually more reliable to interpret her remark as indicating that she is thrilled about the possibility of having found the Messiah as seen in her urgency to share this good news but at the same time she finds such a reality too good to be true.

1.4 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 31–42*

While the woman is coming back to Jesus with her townspeople, the disciples urge Jesus to eat. Though such a request by the disciples is not wrong in and of itself, the story has been told so far in a way that could render the disciples' action as inadequate. Readers have seen that Jesus was willing to wait on his drinking because Jesus's priority was not so much to quench his own thirst but the thirst of the woman (in fact, it is the living water that the narrative is mainly concerned about). In light of such prioritising, readers can see how untimely the disciples' request may be; Jesus's and their hunger can wait since something much more crucial is going to happen. If the disciples truly understood the mission of Jesus, they would not have been surprised to see Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman[57] and also would not have insisted on eating at this

55 Though this verb can be rendered both in positive and negative ways, the context seems to indicate the negative attitude on the part of the disciples towards Jesus's behaviour.

56 The woman is asking the question "as though a negative answer might be expected, but a positive one is hoped for." Morris, *John*, 243–244.

57 Schneiders suggests that the disciples' confusion over Jesus's conversation with a woman

critical moment. Such lack of knowledge on the part of the disciples is pointed out by Jesus in v. 32; ἐγὼ βρῶσιν ἔχω φαγεῖν ἣν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε. Careful readers can see parallels between "ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε (v. 32)" and "εἰ ᾔδεις (v. 10a)"[58] that both the woman and the disciples have trouble seeing the identity and mission of Jesus. The disciples' misunderstanding has become known to readers through narratorial comments (vv. 27, 33), and such a literary technique helps readers judge the character of the disciples.

As discussed previously, readers are expected to believe the narrator's statements as true and reliable, and such narratorial comments are often used to guide readers' moral judgment by giving authoritative opinions about "the events recounted or the character of the figures involved."[59] For example, in Plutarch's *Life of Sulla*, readers see that Sulla overlooks the misbehaviour of his soldiers who killed the legate Albinus with clubs and stones, and the narrator evaluates Sulla's action as follows; "he passed over without punishment this flagrant crime" (*Sull.* 6.9). Such a brief narratorial comment clearly condemns not only the murder itself but also Sulla's lack of adequate response to the horrendous crime committed by his own soldiers. In a similar manner, the narrator of the Gospel portrays the disciples negatively due to their persistent misunderstanding and thus implicitly warns his readers not to identify with the disciples but rather with the Samaritan woman who is making significant progress in her understanding of Jesus. Again, what seems to be an insignificant narratorial comment can exert a significant moralising effect on readers by neutralising the centuries-long stigma on the Samaritans as contemptible and unworthy of any honour and also by presenting the Samaritan woman as a commendable example to emulate.

Jesus no longer uses the imagery of water but brings in the new term βρῶμα, which refers to "ποιήσω τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με καὶ τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον" (4:34). The notion of Jesus being sent by the Father has been a common one (1:14, 18, 34; 2:16; 3:16–17, 35–36), but the notion of Jesus doing the will of the Sender is new to readers. Soon readers will see, however, that doing the will of the Sender is one of the most prominent theological themes in John's Gospel (5:30; 6:38; 7:17; 9:31) and is directly related to the theme of discipleship since the disciples are also called to fulfill the works of the Father as Jesus is. Readers

(4:27) shows that the disciples would have been offended by the missionary role that the woman takes due to their feeling of superiority as "the privileged associates of Jesus." Sandra M. Schneiders, "A Case Study: A Feminist Interpretation of John 4:1–42," in *The Interpretation of John* (ed. John Ashton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 235–259 (250).

58 Okure, *Mission*, 138.

59 Simon Verdegem, *Plutarch's Life of Alcibiades: Story, Text and Moralism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 83.

may wonder why Jesus utters such a profound statement after talking to the Samaritan woman in the land of Samaria, rather than in Judea or in Galilee. It is this very timing at which Jesus speaks that makes the statement more powerful than it would otherwise be. What could be more worldview-transforming on the part of the disciples and readers than finding out τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός is actually being accomplished in the land of Samaria by the Samaritan woman?

Readers can now look back and see the force of the narratorial comment in v. 4 where it says that Jesus had to (δεῖ) pass through Samaria.[60] Those readers who might have shared the disciples' perspective on the Samaritans would be put to shame by this point as they realise that God's saving plan is not localised as to include only the Israelites but also the people considered unworthy even to interact with. The food is then closely tied to the notion of θερισμός in vv. 35–38. As living water does not refer to ordinary drinking water, "the harvest he (Jesus) has in mind is a harvest of souls, not of grain."[61] The adverb ἤδη in v. 35 hints at the urgency of the task, which lies before Jesus and the disciples, and the present tense verbs λαμβάνει and συνάγει in v. 36 signify that the task is yet to be finished. The scope of this chapter forbids us to go into many theological and grammatical issues arising from this last part of the narrative, but it is enough to note that the will of the Sender indicates the gathering of those who are ripe (λευκαί, literally meaning 'white') for harvest.

With Jesus's helpful commentary on the meaning of 'food', readers see another role reversal; it is the woman who does the will of the Sender by hurrying off to her town to share the good news which later results in "gathering fruit for eternal life" (4:36), whereas the disciples have come back with the wrong kind of food, which spoils and is no good for eternal life. Knowingly or unknowingly, the woman is taking up the role of reaper and is soon going to share the joy of the harvest with the sower. The reason why reaper and sower can rejoice together is that they "operate in view of the same goal and reality, eternal life."[62] If the disciples had known Jesus's mission correctly and that the fields were already white for harvest, they would not have asked the questions they did in vv. 27, 33 and would have returned to Jesus with more than food since Jesus's gift of life is extended to all who believe. The plural pronouns, ὑμᾶς and ὑμεῖς in 4:38 may be read as to challenge not only the disciples but also readers to take up the mission of joining other harvesters in gathering fruit and thus fulfilling both the θέλημα and ἔργον of the Sender (4:34). The narrative offers, however, more than the mere description of what the will of the Sender is but contains

60 Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 161.
61 Michaels, *John*, 262.
62 Okure, *Mission*, 155.

information that sheds light on the kind of attitude the harvesters should possess as they enter into labour. Jesus makes it clear that the harvesters are simply gathering the crops, which had been planted and cared by others (ἄλλοι).[63] Thus no credit is to be taken by any harvesters since they simply enjoy the fruit of the harvest that they did not work for. Thus this last portion of the narrative implicitly emphasises the fact that having the right kind of work ethics is as important as being a harvester for the Father.

Though implicit, such an observation offers an important moral truth about human nature, which is vulnerable to praises and glory coming from other human beings as previously seen in the case of the disciples of John the Baptist (3:26; cf. 5:44; 7:18; 8:54; 12:43). In fact, Plutarch is often more "concerned to point truth about human nature and shared human experience"[64] than explicitly telling his readers how to behave. For example, in the *Life of Cimon*, Plutarch describes human nature as varied and unpredictable and warns his readers not to perceive people "too zealously or excessively, but with respect, as it were, for human nature's inability to produce a character that is absolutely good and indisputably oriented to virtue" (*Cim.* 2.5).[65] Plutarch here helps his readers recognise that no one is perfectly virtuous and thus everyone including readers must be always on guard "to choose the right line of conduct"[66] by carefully evaluating the deeds of the protagonists in the *Lives*.

In a similar manner, critical readers at this point would not only see the importance of reaping the harvest of ripe fruit but also the danger of misconstruing one's role in this Father-centred enterprise. Despite the woman's active role in bringing many people to Jesus, readers now know that it is the work of the Sower and thus one should avoid attributing the result of the harvest to the woman but only to the Father and the Son. This ethical insight will become even more critical later on since one of the major components of discipleship is mission, and John wants his readers to realise earlier in the narrative that the only thing the reapers can share with the sower is to rejoice (χαίρω) together (4:36). Embracing such an attitude is also compatible with

63 It is very complicated to pinpoint the identity of ἄλλοι in 4:38 and there are as many as six different explanations available for this term. Despite its complexity, it is quite clear that the work (ἔργον) belongs to the Father (4:34) who is not a passive onlooker but the active seeker of those who would worship him in spirit and truth (4:24; 5:17). Furthermore, it has become clear in the story of Nicodemus that conversion is not a work of human endeavour but of divine initiative. In other words, the sower can only be the Father who also shares the work with his Son Jesus (5:19) and thus it is safe to assume that the "others" in 4:38 refer to the Father and Jesus. Okure, *Mission*, 159–164.

64 Pelling, "Moralism," 239.

65 Translation taken from Verdegem, *Alcibiades*, 25.

66 Verdegem, *Alcibiades*, ibid.

what readers will see in the later chapters of the Gospel where Jesus constantly reminds his disciples of his dependence on his Father for whatever he accomplishes during his earthly ministry (5:19–20; 10:15).

The woman's testimony that Jesus knew all of her past stirred the hearts of her townspeople and many of them believed in Jesus (4:39).[67] Unlike Judea where the Pharisees' suspicion of Jesus is rapidly rising, Samaria is where Jesus can rest and even enjoy the hospitality of the people for two days (4:43). Due to Jesus's extended stay, many more came to believe in Jesus, and the woman's testimony is also replaced by Jesus's own, which affirmed and expanded what they heard from the woman. Only after hearing Jesus first hand, they finally confess that Jesus is truly the Saviour of the world. The woman not only takes part in this wonderful harvest but also finally shares the joy of reaping with Jesus and his disciples. Here readers see another *synkrisis*, not between individuals this time but rather between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews have been resistant even to Jesus's own testimony but the Samaritans were quick to respond to the woman's testimony in a positive way even before seeing Jesus face to face. Such a response is highly praised in light of the purpose of the Gospel, and ironically the Samaritans become the ideal group of people whose faith is to be imitated both by the Jews and readers.

2 Conclusion

As seen in the story of Nicodemus, John continues to shape and advance his readers' understanding of Jesus's identity and mission, which is not only fundamental for discipleship but also for transforming readers' existing worldview and values. Such cognitive transformation is always followed by moral transformation since discipleship and moral progress are two sides of the same coin as argued in Chapter 2. This chapter has provided enough examples where, in light of Plutarch's writings, John implicitly but effectively moralises his readers through various narrative devices and techniques. In fact, ancient rhetoric always aims for both "persuasion for or against an idea or action … and the moral and cultural formation of the audience,"[68] and that is exactly what John tries to accomplish through his telling of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman.

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67 Readers are already familiar with the effect of Jesus's supernatural knowledge, which brought Nathanael to faith in 1:49.

68 Kathy Reiko Maxwell, *Hearing Between the Lines: The Audience as Fellow-Worker in Luke–Acts and its Literary Milieu* (LNTS 425; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 43.

John's comparison between Judea and Samaria, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the Jews and the Samaritans strikes readers in a powerful way as to reassess their existing moral framework in light of the one offered by the Gospel. Redefining the meaning of proper 'worship' also carries tremendous ethical implications for readers since worship is a core constituent of discipleship and thus forms the ethical and moral praxis of the community. If true worship is now gravitated towards the Father only through Jesus, the ethical paradigm for Jesus's followers must also be redefined and gravitated towards the teachings and examples of Jesus. Furthermore, surpassing gender and ethnic boundaries clearly shows that following Jesus requires one to move beyond the conventional social and religious borders, and such changes can also serve as a catalyst for believers to reconsider the scope of mission as to include even the Samaritans.[69] Though without offering any explicit guidance on moral behaviour, this chapter has shown that narrative has the intrinsic power to change the readers' moral vision slowly but not less effectively than direct ethical injunctions.

69 A similar conclusion is reached by Wagener, *Figuren*, 409–412.

CHAPTER 5

Reading the Story of the Man Born Blind Ethically

1 A Brief Overview of Chapters 5–8

Before examining the story of the man born blind, it is important to observe how the narrative develops up to John 9. It is not possible to engage each episode within these chapters in detail; instead, we will try to investigate chosen ethical themes that run through these chapters and see how the overall storyline shapes the readers' moral worldview and thus prepares readers for the story of the blind man.

Immediately after the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus is back again in Cana where he performed his first sign of changing water into wine. There Jesus is encountered by an official whose son is critically ill, and the official came to Cana all the way from Capernaum to plead with Jesus to heal his dying son. Here Jesus warns this official or Jews in general (the verbs that Jesus is using are second-person plural; δητε, πιστεύσητε) against "an unwholesome preoccupation with the miraculous"[1] that fails to appreciate its messianic significance (4:48). Unlike those Jews who refuse to believe in Jesus even after witnessing Jesus's sign, the official displays remarkable faith by believing in Jesus's word even before reaching home to confirm the healing of his son.[2] This particular story, which is the last episode of the Cana cycle in John 2–4, follows a similar pattern found in the story of the Samaritan woman in that true faith is demonstrated in an insignificant place (Judea vs. Galilee; 1:46) through an insignificant individual (a Gentile). These little details repeatedly challenge readers to reevaluate their cultural or social expectations, and such counter-cultural episodes not only indicate the universal scope of God's salvation but also effectively engage readers in terms of shaping their moral convictions.

After a brief healing story of an official's son in 4:46–54, which results in the salvation of the official's whole family, readers are introduced to the cycle of the Jewish feasts, which spans chapters 5–10. In John 5 Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and performs another sign of healing, which ignites the flames of

1 Köstenberger, *Theology*, 205.

2 John portrays faith based on hearing to be greater and more genuine than faith based on seeing. See Craig R. Koester, "Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John," *Bib* 70 (1989): 327–348.

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conflict between the Jews and Jesus.[3] Here the cause of conflict[4] is due to the obvious disparity in terms of viewpoint; the Jews claim that Jesus has no authority to heal on the Sabbath (5:16), whereas Jesus counterclaims that he has such authority by referring to the two activities—giving life and judging (5:19–30)—which he claims to have been authorised by the Father to perform. If Jesus is the Son of God and his healing is the result of imitating the Father (5:19, 21), the Jews' accusation against Jesus is not valid since Jesus is simply doing a legitimate Sabbath activity.

As the narrative develops, readers find out that the Jews' misunderstanding is not so much caused by their inability as their unwillingness to believe in Jesus due to their lack of love of God and the pursuit of glory coming from people (5:42, 44). Here John is at pains to demonstrate Jesus's true identity in light of Jesus's lengthy self-justification (5:19–47), and readers are challenged to evaluate whose claims are true.[5] Surprisingly, the basis of the judgment[6] of both Jesus and the Jews is the same, namely, the law. The Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy based on the law given by Moses (5:18), whereas Jesus claims his innocence by testifying that Moses wrote of him (5:39, 46)—the only difference between them is their interpretation of the law.[7]

The fact that the Jews and Jesus judge each other based on the law indicates that understanding the role of the law in John's Gospel is crucial for understanding Johannine ethical dynamics. It is interesting to note that the name Moses appears densely in Jesus's discourses during the festival cycle (5:45–46; 6:32; 7:19; 7:22–23), and such a heavy use of Moses seems to be John's rhetorical tactic to show that the Jews' traditional criteria of judgment should now be reoriented in the light of the Son to whom Moses testifies. Though a cursory

3 Having seen the negative connotations associated with Judea, the conflict is quite expected.

4 The Jews' increasing hostility towards Jesus is also evident by the fact that the verb ζητέω, which carries a connotation for discipleship in 1:38, begins to take "a dark turn in chapters 5–10 (7:1, 11, 19, 20, 25, 30, 34, 36; 8:21, 37, 40), where the Jewish leaders begin 'seeking Jesus to kill him' because of his work on the Sabbath and claim to be the Son of God." Gerry Wheaton, *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel* (SNTSMS 162; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 132.

5 Wheaton has effectively shown that the major role of the feast in John 5–10 is to "contribute to John's presentation of the divine identity of Jesus." Wheaton, *Jewish Feasts*, 185.

6 One of the most dominant themes in these chapters is the theme of judgment. That the verb κρίνω (5:22, 30; 7:24, 8:15–16, 26, 50) and noun κρίσις (5:22, 24, 27, 29–30; 7:24; 8:16) appear heavily in this part of narrative shows that what is at stake in the festival cycle is how one comes to view the nature of the judgment Jesus brings to the world.

7 For a helpful discussion of how the correct interpretation of the law determines the ethical dynamic in John's Gospel, see van der Watt, "Opponents," 175–191.

reading of the Gospel may give readers the impression that Jesus denigrates the role of Moses (6:32) or the value of the Torah (8:17), Jesus simply wants the Jews to understand that he came to fulfill what had been promised in Moses' writings, and a correct understanding of the Torah would naturally lead them to believe in him (5:46). Without this reorientation, they cannot judge with right judgment as they judge only through appearances (7:24; cf. 8:15). It also becomes clear that it is the Jews who do not keep the law (7:19), and even Moses on whom they set their hope becomes their accuser (5:45); after all, it is not Jesus but the Jews who are on trial. A division (σχίσμα) among the people (7:43) indicates that not everyone accepts the Pharisees' judgment, and readers are once again challenged to take sides either with the Jews or with those who claim that Jesus is the Christ (7:41).

The ethical implications of rejecting Jesus become more profound in this part of the Gospel since rejecting Jesus is shown to be the same as rejecting the one who sent him, namely the Father. In fact, Jesus firmly states that the evidence for his unique relationship with the Father is sufficient since both John the Baptist and the Father himself bear witness about him. Especially regarding the Father's witness, Salier argues that "the testimony of the Father consists in the works that Jesus does."[8] In other words, the fact that Jesus performs the works (ἔργα) of the Father is the ultimate proof that Jesus is from God. Readers are already familiar with the ethical implications that the word ἔργα carries in the Gospel (3:19–21),[9] and such an ethical force of the term is reemphasised in 5:29, where doing good (ἀγαθός), which is believing in Jesus, leads to eternal life, whereas doing evil (φαῦλος), which is rejecting Jesus, leads to judgment.

Despite seeing the same work, people can come to radically different understandings of what the work of God is. For the Jews, the work of God is knowing and keeping the law of Moses, and whoever does not know or keep the law is considered cursed under traditional Jewish thought (7:49).[10] For Jesus, however, the work of God is to believe in the one whom God has sent (6:29). Moreover, the work of God is later brought into close connection with the will of the Father (6:40), which is described as giving eternal life to and raising those who look (θεωρέω) on the Son and believe in him (6:40). Here the work of God (believing in Jesus) fulfills the will of the Father (eternal life). Thus doing the

8 Willis Hedley Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Sēmeia in the Gospel of John* (WUNT II/148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 81.

9 See Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 87–88.

10 Despite the Jews' zeal for the law, Jesus condemns them for not listening to God's voice (5:37), not believing in (receiving) Jesus (5:38, 40, 43), lacking the love of God (5:42), not seeking God's glory (5:44) and not believing Moses (5:45–47).

work of God is the same as doing the will of the Father, and the Jews' rejection of Jesus can be then understood as a failure to do both the work of God and the will of the Father.

As the story develops, the notion of discipleship also begins to take a stronger connotation of intimacy and is no longer confined to the act of believing in Jesus but refers to a radically intimate union between Jesus and believers. In Chapter 3 readers have already seen that the verb μένω is associated with the theme of discipleship, and the same verb in 6:56 is linked to the act of eating Jesus's flesh and drinking his blood, which signifies mutual indwelling between Jesus and the disciples. As Jesus's teachings became more personal and intense, more people became offended (6:61) and no longer walked with Jesus (6:66). Here readers can glimpse an important aspect of Johannine discipleship, that is a persistent trust in Jesus in spite of difficult teachings (cf. 8:31; 15:6). What this observation implies is that discipleship is not a static phenomenon but must involve a growing intimacy and trust between Jesus and his followers.

The ethical overtones of discipleship are further elaborated because Jesus portrays those who follow him as μὴ περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἕξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς (8:12). Readers have already seen that the works that are done in darkness (σκότος) are evil (3:19; 7:7), and thus only those who walk (περιπατέω) in light (φῶς) by following Jesus (8:12) are capable of doing the good works that are approved by God. The Greek verb, περιπατέω, often carries ethical connotations in the conceptual world of ancient Judaism and refers to a notion of conducting one's life. When Jesus elucidates what it means to follow him in terms of not walking in darkness in 8:12, it is highly probable that Jesus is speaking metaphorically to highlight the moral implications of one's unbelief.

Such an ethical reading becomes even more promising when John's Gospel is read against the ethical dualism found in 1QS where walking in darkness is "characterized by greed, sluggishness in the pursuit of justice, wickedness, falsehood, pride, haughtiness of heart, dishonesty, cruelty, much insincerity, impatience, much foolishness, impudent enthusiasm for appalling acts performed in a lustful passion, filthy paths in the service of impurity, blasphemous tongue, blindness of eyes, hardness of hearing, stiffness of neck, and hardness of heart (1QS 4.11)."[11] Jesus not only condemns the Jews' unbelief as morally reprehensible but also Jesus's words, "in your law" (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ) in

11 Raymond F. Collins, "'Follow Me': A Life-Giving Ethical Imperative," in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*. (ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 43–64 (51).

8:17 seems to indicate Jesus's intentional distancing from the Jewish interpretation of the law, which instead of assisting the Jews to do the work of God has made them like their father who is a murderer and liar (8:44). The mounting conflict signifies that Jesus and the Jews cannot possibly have the same Father, and consequently their view of what is right and wrong turns out to be vastly different.

Ch. 8 ends with a gloomy prospect of Jesus's fate as the narrator tells readers that the Jews were trying to stone Jesus for claiming himself to be existent before Abraham. More importantly, the narrator also highlights the fact that Jesus went out of the temple (8:59). Though the real time lapse between ch. 8 and ch. 9 is unknown, readers have the benefit of reading these stories consecutively, and such a continuous reading often strengthens the rhetorical effect on readers. Readers already know John's rhetorical intention of placing the story of the Samaritan woman right after the story of Nicodemus. The fact that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, failed to believe in Jesus but that the Samaritan woman not only believed but also brought others to Jesus is surely a worldview-changing phenomenon for many readers. If such a pattern reappears, it becomes quite persuasive to argue that Jesus neither shows favouritism nor judges people by appearances like the Jews since Jesus not only approaches but also uses the most unlikely people such as the Samaritan woman to bring forth the message of deliverance from darkness and sin (8:12, 32, 34).

The first-time readers of the Gospel do not yet know the outcome of the story of the blind man. What they know at this point is that the Jews not only refuse to listen to Jesus but are also trying to stone him (8:59). Moreover, Jesus's unpopularity in the land of Judea is once again confirmed since Jesus had to leave (ἐξέρχομαι) the temple for safety (cf. 4:3). In other words, Jesus cannot expect anything but persecution and death threat from the Jews in the land of Judea. Readers are then drawn to this pericope maybe in the hope of finding a similar pattern as found in chs. 3 and 4, that is using the blind man to challenge the dominant social and religious expectations. The brief analysis of chs. 5–8 clearly shows that these chapters are heavily embedded with the elements that are critical in understanding the Johannine ethical paradigm, and with these new insights, readers are now introduced to the man born blind.

2 Ethical Reading of the Man Born Blind

2.1 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 1–7*

The narrative begins by pointing out that the man was blind from birth, and the Johannine imagery of darkness may suggest that the man may also be in

spiritual darkness (cf. 3:2).[12] At the narrative level, the disciples' blunt question relating sin with the man's physical condition may not be too far off the mark since Jesus does not refute their question with criticism (9:2), and the Pharisees' remark later in 9:34 indicates the widespread belief that sin may be the cause of a person's ailment (cf. 5:14). What is problematic with the disciples' question is that they still seem to share the worldview that is based on Jewish traditions, and Jesus's answer subverts such a popular connection between sin and illness by giving a whole new perspective on the matter—blindness has a function of displaying the works (ἔργα) of God (9:3; cf. 11:4).

Readers are by now familiar with the Johannine concept of sin, which is unbelief in Jesus, and such an understanding of sin is evident as we probe Jesus's reaction to the Jews. Nowhere does Jesus condemn the Jews as harshly as he does in the case of contaminating the glory of God (2:13–22; 7:18; 8:50) and resisting believing in himself (8:39–47). Thus careful readers may find the disciples' question inadequate or even disappointing because Jesus has made clear so far what sin really is and its devastating consequence, which is much more than physical blindness. Their curiosity yet stops at the superficial level of questioning the connection between sin and illness. In fact, the disciples' naïve question may remind readers of another naïve question asked by the disciples back in 4:33 (Has anyone brought him something to eat?). If they really understood the purpose of Jesus's ministry at all, they would have directed their attention to the man's spiritual status or even asked Jesus to heal the blind man. Their concern for the blind man, however, does not go beyond what other ordinary Jews would have towards him.

It is interesting to note that Jesus uses the first-person plural pronoun (ἡμᾶς) in urging people to do the works of God but it is not clear what this plural pronoun refers to (9:4). Does it refer to the disciples, the blind man or both of them? In light of the purpose of the Gospel (20:31), such an inclusive pronoun signifies the fact that anyone who has made a decision to believe in Jesus must also share the divine imperative (δεῖ; cf. 4:4) of witnessing the Son to the world. In the immediate context, however, the plural pronoun seems to refer only to the blind man and Jesus himself since the disciples disappear from the scene as if they are not yet ready to engage in the work of God as evidenced by their inadequate question. If this assumption is correct, "the narrator is anticipating not only the 'work of God' in the miracle about to follow but also the 'work of God' in the witness, central to the narrative, of the man once he gains

12 Such an interpretation gains even more support in relation to the birth motif in ch. 3 where Jesus links the birth language with the undeniable reality of spiritual darkness.

his sight."[13] Though Jesus has told the crowds what the work of God is back in 6:29, he has never included others in the same subject in relation to the notion of working the works of God (5:17).[14] It seems that Jesus begins to be more inclusive and specific in demanding his followers what to do as his time on earth is running out, as will be seen below.

The connection between the singular and plural form of ἔργον needs some further explanation. The works of God (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ) in 9:3 can be understood as the works of Jesus[15] since the Father has already entrusted the Son with the authority to accomplish his works (5:36). These works then "include all of Jesus's ministry, including the 'signs'"[16] and are supposed to lead to the singular work of God, that is to believe in him whom God has sent (6:29). As seen in the previous chapter, the works of God which are displayed in Jesus's works (signs)[17] prove "the identity of the Son in his relationship to the Father."[18] If such relationship between the works (ἔργα) and work (ἔργον) of God is valid, it is reasonable to conclude that all the other works (signs) of God are subordinated or ancillary to the work of God, which is believing in Jesus.

Readers go on to find out why Jesus urgently emphasises doing the works of God—day (ἡμέρα) is coming fast to an end and night (νὺξ) will soon take over when no one will be able to work (9:4). Readers are already aware of the ethical dualism from ch. 3 where works (ἔργα) are associated either with φῶς or σκότος, and a similar pattern is also found in 9:4 except that there is a temporal dimension added to it (cf. 12:35–36).[19] Jesus's time limitations have been made clear in several places (2:4; 7:6; 7:30; 7:33; 8:20), and in light of those passages readers would naturally come to understand the night in 9:4 as referring to a limited time that Jesus is given on earth before returning to the Father (7:33). From the readers' point of view, it also gives them a limited time within which they must make a decision of faith.[20] Unlike 8:12, Jesus no longer simply states

13 J.W. Holleran, "A Narrative Reading of John 9. II," *ETL* 69 (1993): 354–382 (357).

14 Despite the inclusive plural pronoun, Jesus is the only one who is sent by the Father (πέμψαντός με).

15 Van den Bussche persuasively argues that chs. 5–10 can be viewed as a unified literary unit, which emphasises the works of Jesus as the works of God. H. van den Bussche, "La structure de Jean I–XII," in *L'Evangile de Jean: études et problèmes* (ed. M.-E. Boismard; Recherches Bibliques III; Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1958), 61–109.

16 Carson, *John*, 261.

17 At a literary level, both Jesus's works and signs have the same rhetorical function of inciting a response of belief from the reader. Thus "the reader is certainly encouraged by these connections to read the terms into one another." See Salier, *Sēmeia*, 81.

18 Salier, *Sēmeia*, 80.

19 Hugo Mendez, "'Night' and 'Day' in John 9.4–5: A Reassessment," *NTS* 61 (2015): 468–481.

20 In the immediate context, the night may signify the passion of Christ but "the night

his role as the light of the world but proves himself as light by healing the blind man. In fact, Jesus does not ask the man if he wants to be healed, as in 5:6, but takes action right away by putting on mud on the man's eyes made (ποιέω) of his spit[21] and telling him to go, wash in the pool of Siloam.[22] Such an active initiative taken by Jesus could be due to the fact that the night is drawing near.

The narrator's concise description of the man's action—ἀπῆλθεν οὖν καὶ ἐνίψατο καὶ ἦλθεν βλέπων—highlights the "radical obedience"[23] this man shows to the words of Jesus, and such obedience creates a sharp contrast against the Pharisees or more generally 'the Jews' who are not willing to abide in Jesus's word (8:31). The examples of 'radical obedience' appear throughout the Gospel (2:5–7; 4:50; 5:8–9) and thus inform readers about the kind of obedience that Jesus expects from his followers. As will be seen later, radical obedience is a crucial component of true discipleship and is what distinguishes authentic believers from those who are not. Furthermore, as the blind man went to the pool Siloam, which means 'Sent', to be healed of his blindness (9:7), readers are also encouraged to follow suit by coming to Jesus who is 'the Sent one' himself.[24]

2.2 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 8–23*

An appearance of the neighbours (γείτων) and other bystanders, who are presumably the residents of Jerusalem,[25] foreshadows a difficult situation both for Jesus and the man since Jerusalem has been the central place of conflict

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which sets a limit to every person's work can come in different forms, through death, through external obstacles, through the course of history." Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (trans. Cecily Hastings, et al.; III vols.; London: Burnes & Oates, 1980), II:242.

21 Some scholars see in Jesus's healing some meaningful allusions to the creation motif in Genesis and thus view Jesus's act not as an act of healing but as an act of creation. For a helpful analysis of John 9 on the symbolic value of creation, see Daniel Frayer-Griggs, "Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead Sea Scrolls," *JBL* 132 (2013): 659–670.

22 It would not have been difficult for readers who are familiar with the OT to recall the story of Elisha telling Naaman to wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10–13) but the difference between them is clear; the blind man did so without any complaint.

23 Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 122.

24 The fact that John uses water (Siloam) and light (sight) as the dominant theme of John 9 signifies that it is important to understand Jesus's healing in light of the Feast of Tabernacles during which Jesus proclaims to be the giver of living water (7:37) and the light of the world (8:12). Through the healing of the blind man, Jesus proves himself to be the living water and the light that give eternal life. See Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus's Healing the Blind Man in John 9," *BSac* 167 (2010): 307–318 (313–314).

25 From the literary perspective, the fact that the healing took place shortly after Jesus left

for Jesus.[26] The crowds' confusion over the man's identity in 9:8 resembles the confusion the people had over Jesus's identity in 8:40–44, and the man's simple but a courageous answer, ἐγώ εἰμι, settles the muddle. Some readers may find it surprising to see such a phrase coming out the blind man's mouth since the expression ἐγώ εἰμι has been used only by Jesus so far (4:26; 6:20, 35, 48; 6:20; 8:12, 24, 28, 58). As seen in the previous chapter, readers who are familiar with the Old Testament would easily make the connection between Jesus's use of ἐγώ εἰμι and God revealing his divinity in the OT (Exod 3:14; Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6). Despite some studies that regard the man's self-description as having some sort of affinity to Jesus's use of ἐγώ εἰμι,[27] a majority of scholars rightly argue that the man's expression of ἐγώ εἰμι carries "none of the grand overtones"[28] and is "only a non-religious use."[29]

Most scholars who argue for an ordinary use of ἐγώ εἰμι here, however, do not see the ethical significance of the man's claim. The man's gaining of sight stirs up a great fuss among crowds who are trying to make sense of what has happened to the blind man. The man, who is at the bottom of social ladder, may not want to be the subject of a major controversy such as this since he has no social power to protect himself when things go wrong. The man does not, however, hide himself behind the crowd but rather steps forward and confirms his identity as the *formerly* blind man; the use of the imperfect tense (ἔλεγεν ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι; kept saying) shows that the man has no intention whatsoever of running away from the scene. Readers have already seen the man's radical obedience when he obeyed Jesus's words without any hesitation (9:7) and now see the man's another virtuous character, that is bravery. Though readers are not sure just yet whether this blind man ultimately moves on to become a disciple of Jesus, they nonetheless begin to see that the man, not the disciples, is the one who does the works of God along with Jesus (9:4). It is important to note that

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the temple may indicate that the incident happened somewhere near Jerusalem and the location of Siloam could also be a hint for the readers who are familiar with the geography of Jerusalem.

26 Keener, *John*, 1:783.

27 For those who take this position, see Johannes Jeremias, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Eine Urchristliche Erklärung für die Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Müller, 1931), 191, 205; John Marsh, *St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 380; Mikeal Parsons, "A Neglected EGO EIMI Saying in the Fourth Gospel?," in *Perspectives on John: Method and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel* (eds. Robert B. Sloan and Mikeal C. Parsons; Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen 1993), 145–180; Wes Howard-Brook, *Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994), 219.

28 Lindars, *John*, 344.

29 Barrett, *John*, 359.

the man's bravery well coincides with that of Jesus whose witness to the Father also puts his life at risk (5:18; 7:1, 25; 8:37, 40). From the readers' perspective, the man's brave defense of Jesus can function as an earlier sign of mimesis because the man's bold witness to Jesus closely resembles Jesus's faithful witness to the Father.

The crowds' interrogation is now directed to the manner in which he was healed and then to Jesus's whereabouts.[30] The man's terse answers (vv. 11–12), however, do not satisfy their curiosity and thereby they bring him to the Pharisees "whose judgment they are accustomed to respect (cf. 7:26)."[31] Readers expect to see a major upheaval in the storyline as the narrator spells out that it was the Sabbath on which the healing took place. Readers have already encountered John's tendency to give this crucial information once the action is completed (5:9), and how such information foretells the upcoming conflict. The Pharisees ask the man the same question which was already asked by the crowd, but the answer the man gives to the Pharisees is even less vivid than the previous one—πηλὸν ἐπέθηκέν μου ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐνιψάμην καὶ βλέπω (9:15). Such an abbreviated answer by the man has been seen by numerous scholars mainly as John's way of cutting down what is already a redundant account.[32] Staley gives, however, another reading which sees the man's condensed response as a way of defending Jesus from the Pharisees. According to Staley, "the man does not use the narrator's word 'make clay' (ποιέω) or 'anoint' (ἐπιχρίω) as he had earlier (9:11; cf. 9:6, 14), but instead, switches to the innocuous 'put clay' (ἐπιτίθημι, 9:15). In so doing he successfully shields Jesus from two possible Sabbath violations."[33]

Such a reading gains even more support especially in light of the root cause of the conflict in the last four chapters which all started with Jesus's healing on the Sabbath. If the blind man knew anything of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, he would have chosen his words carefully not to put his

30 The man's ignorance of Jesus's whereabouts may signify his incomplete understanding of Jesus's identity at this moment since "the discovery of whence Jesus comes, whither he goes and where he 'dwells' is the discovery of who Jesus is (cf. 1;38, 39)." Holleran, "John 9," 364.

31 Schnackenburg, *John*, 11:247.

32 For those who support such an interpretation, see Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7–21* (2 vols.; Hermeneia Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2:39; Schnackenburg, *John*, 11:247–248; James L. Resseguie, "John 9: A Literary-Critical Analaysis," in *Literary Interpretation of Biblical Narratives* (eds. R.R. Kenneth and Gros Louis; 2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 2: 295–303 (300).

33 Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, "Stumbling in the Dark, Reaching for the Light: Reading Character in John 5 and 9," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 55–80 (67).

benefactor in danger again (*contra* 5:15–16). If Staley's argument is valid, the Pharisees' judgment of Jesus as a Sabbath-breaker in 9:16 is "based on the neighbors' remarks"[34] since the man's response has no details whatsoever that could lead to such a conclusion. The Pharisees' persistent failure to listen fairly and carefully to Jesus and his followers is shown in 5:18, where they falsely judge Jesus for making himself equal to God when Jesus simply states that God is his Father, and also in 7:51 where the Pharisees would not give Jesus a fair hearing. Thus the Pharisees' judgment about Jesus in general is not founded on facts or Jesus's own words but rather upon their preconceived prejudice about Jesus. Such an attitude shows that the Pharisees are only interested in seeking their own glory, not the glory of the Father since they speak and judge on their own authority (7:17–18).[35]

The division (σχίσμα) readers encounter in ch. 9 and also back in 7:12, 23, 43, 46 may indicate that it is not that some are predetermined by God for eternal life while others are left to damnation (this issue will be dealt with in depth later). Rather it may signify the fact that some are trying to listen to Jesus fairly, not letting their prejudice get in the way of understanding Jesus's teachings, while others intentionally close their ears to the words that do not fit "the criteria established by their interpretation of the Law."[36] Put differently, their overdependence on their religious traditions and their own authority has not only resulted in arrogance (8:33, 39, 41), but also has blinded their eyes and blocked their ears to the revelation of God, which points to Jesus.

Such reasoning is not unfounded in the text because not all Pharisees are against Jesus; some are even entertaining a thought that Jesus might be from God (9:16; cf. Nicodemus). Similarly, not all Jesus's immediate family members or disciples believe in Jesus (7:5; 6:66). What this shows is that John portrays

34 Staley, "Stumbling," ibid.

35 Such false love for their own glory is not only prevalent among those who openly oppose Jesus but also among the crowds who openly follow Jesus. After the Sabbath controversy in John 5, Jesus appears in the land of Galilee and performs the sign of feeding the five thousand. On the next day, the crowds are said to seek (ζητέω) Jesus but Jesus knows that their seeking of him is based on a wrong motive: "you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (6:26). Whatever the crowd meant by identifying Jesus as a prophet (6:14), they surely did not see his glory revealed in those signs (*Contra* 2:11; 2:23), but all they wanted from Jesus was a continual supply of bread (6:34; cf. 4:15). Even Jesus's own brothers do not believe in Jesus and thus their encouragement to Jesus to make himself known publicly (7:4) stems not from their belief in Jesus but from their desire of receiving glory from people (cf. 5:44).

36 Sandra M. Schneiders, "To see or Not to See: John 9 as a Synthesis of the Theology and Spirituality of Discipleship," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (eds. John Painter, et al.; St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 189–209 (193).

salvation not only on a corporate scale[37] but also "on an individual scale."[38] Though some passages like 11:52 seem to signify the corporate nature of God's salvific plan, salvation is nonetheless dependent on an individual's decision to believe in Jesus. Such faith in Jesus is primarily engendered by hearing Jesus (1:37; 1:40; 2:22; 4:42; 5:24; 6:45; 8:43; 8:47). In fact, hearing is one of the sensory perceptions that John links with 'believing'[39] and is a more effective means of coming to faith than seeing since those who "manifest signs faith consistently fail to move beyond it."[40] It is important to note that it is not so much the questioning the validity of Jesus's words that is considered wrong in the Gospel as the intentional refusal to give a fair hearing to Jesus's words. Unlike the stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the narrator does not focus on misunderstanding in this story but rather overtly brings out the Pharisees' intentional refusal to listen not only to the man's testimony but also to anything that contributes to the positive evaluation of Jesus.

Though the ethical or pedagogical significance of listening is often overlooked in modern times, the ability to listen appropriately was considered an important virtue in the Greco-Roman world. Plutarch, for example, emphasises that "right listening is the beginning of right living" (*Rect. rat. aud.* 48D). In other words, how you listen is as crucial as what you listen to since "how one listens can be decisive in what is heard."[41] Though Plutarch's advice on 'listening' is intended primarily for proper behaviour in classroom settings, it is still helpful to see the core aspects of right listening from the ancient perspective. Here is a little portion of Plutarch's advice on listening:

> In all cases, then, silence is a safe adornment … especially so, when in listening to another he does not get excited or bawl out every minute, but even if the remarks be none too agreeable, puts up with them, and waits for the speaker to pause, and, when the pause comes, does not at

37 The corporate aspect of discipleship will become clearer later in the Farewell Discourse.

38 C.F.D. Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91–110 (103). Cf. Mark L. Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT II/1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976), 265.

39 Bennema gives a helpful summary of the relationship between sensory perception and belief-response. Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT II/148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 124–126.

40 Koester, "Hearing, Seeing, and Believing," 348.

41 Andre Archie, "Listening to Plutarch's Alcibiades in Plato's Alcibiades Major," in *Politics in Socrates' Alcibiades: A Philosophical Account of Plato's Dialogue Alcibiades Major* (London: Springer 2015), 103–121 (104).

> once interpose his objection, but … allows an interval to elapse, in case the speaker may desire to add something to what he has said, or to alter or unsay anything. But those who instantly interrupt with contradictions, neither hearing nor being heard, but talking while others talk, behave in an unseemly manner; whereas the man who has the habit of listening with restraint and respect, takes in and masters a useful discourse, and more readily sees through and detects a useless or false one, showing himself thus to be a lover of truth and not a lover of disputation, nor froward and contentious.
>
> *Rect. rat. aud.* 38C–D

As seen above, Plutarch more than anything stresses 'patience' and 'humility' in obtaining the virtue of right listening and also warns people against the "human failings of envy and pride, self-conceit, or misguided admiration."[42] Moreover, those who only prefer listening to pleasant utterances and thus refuse to be corrected are described as a fool who runs away from a physician after an operation before having the wound bandaged (*Rect. rat. aud.* 47F). Put differently, "when the word has cut and wounded a man's foolishness, if he give it no chance to heal and quiet the wound, he comes away from philosophy with a smart and pain but with no benefit … the smart from philosophy which sinks deep in young men of good parts is healed by the very words which inflicted the hurt" (*Rect. rat. aud.* 46F–47A). Here Plutarch contends that one must not desert philosophy just because one is dispirited by its teachings but rather one should be willing to give a fair hearing since the very words that cause distress also have the power to heal.

Among many emotional dispositions, Plutarch asserts that envy is one of the most powerful emotions that is not only an obstacle to right listening but to all that is honourable (*Rect. rat. aud.* 39D). Envy (φθόνος) is defined as "pain at another's good" (*Curios*. 518C) and is often accompanied by hatred (*Inv. Od.* 536E–538E). Those who are envious cannot listen to others properly since they are "not interested so much in the demonstration of the proof" but their minds are rather "stung by the wealth, or repute, or beauty possessed by another … [and are] depressed by the good fortunes of others" (*Rect. rat. aud.* 39E). Though John does not use φθόνος in his Gospel, the Jews nonetheless have shown a similar emotional disposition towards Jesus all along. According to Cicero, people are provoked to envy most intensely when someone who was once beneath

42 Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 126.

them gets promoted ahead of them (*De. or*. 2.52.209). In the previous chapters, readers have seen that the Jews in general have a derogatory opinion of Jesus based on his Galilean origin (1:46), his family background (6:42), and his learning (7:15). Thus the Jews (even John's disciples) are envious of Jesus as he gains popularity and fame among the crowds (3:26; 11:48; cf. 12:11) because they consider Jesus to be someone who is unworthy of such honour. The Jews are then not capable of listening impartially to the blind man and ultimately to Jesus since their minds are blurred by the destructive power of envy and are also obsessed with maintaining their standing among the people.

From such an ethical perspective, readers can easily see that the Jews' attitude of mind in listening to Jesus or the blind man is nowhere close to the ideals offered by John or even by Plutarch. The Jews have already reached the final verdict on the identity of Jesus as a sinner, and any answer that falls short of their verdict is rejected at all cost. Thus the man's identifying Jesus as a prophet (9:17) is plainly dismissed without further inquiry, and the Jews are even trying to discount the healing itself (9:18). Having realised that the healed man would not give the answer they are looking for, the Jews bring the man's parents in for interrogation.[43] It is not only the Jews, however, who are pushing the man to a corner but it is also the man's parents who are afraid to stand up for their own son, and the narrator says why in 9:22: "anyone confessing Jesus to be the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος)." Here the narratorial comment shows that "the question is no longer only whether Jesus is guilty of a Sabbath violation in healing the blind man, but whether the acknowledgement of Jesus as his healer is equivalent to "confessing" (ὁμολογήσῃ) Jesus to be the Christ!"[44] The parents are not willing to confirm anything except that the man is their son and that he was born blind since they are afraid that saying anything affirmative about Jesus would have them expelled from the synagogue.

Put simply, the Jews are trying to deter others from speaking truth through intimidation in order to maintain their authority and the status quo. What has been clear so far then is that the Jews' tactic for interrogation is not based on a fair hearing but rather on threat and coercion. Thus the opponents' persistent refusal to listen fairly to the man's testimony and Jesus's claims should not be understood merely as misunderstanding arising from fixed origins (one's predetermined destiny) but rather as a deliberate hardening of their hearts due to their envy.

43 It is quite obvious that whoever was interrogating the man had the political power to summon the parents at their convenience and to even intimidate them.

44 Holleran, "John 9," 370.

2.3 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 24–34*

The opponents' intention is made even clearer as they bring in the man the second time for interrogation. They use the most hallowed phrase "δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεω" (9:24)[45] for the vilest purpose by forcing the man to witness against his innocent conscience and to deny 'the work of God'. It is ironic to see that the opponents are making the man deny the very foundation upon which the glory of God resides, that is the glory of the Son (5:23). The oneness of the Father and the Son has been made explicit in the previous chapters, and the readers see the ignorance of the opponents on this matter since they claim to know (ἡμεῖς οἴδαμεν)[46] that 'this man' (οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος),[47] meaning Jesus, is a sinner (9:24). The first person plural of οἶδα appears most heavily in this chapter (9:20, 21(×2), 24, 29, 31) and there is a clear contrast between what the opponents claim to know and what the man claims to know. The opponents claim to know that Jesus is a sinner though they were not even physically present at the scene of healing, whereas the man claims to knowledge only based on factual evidence (9:25). In other words, it is the man's testimony that is more reliable than the opponents' false assumptions about Jesus.

The Jews asking the man the same questions again indicates that they are no longer interested in the truth but they simply want the man to agree with their already-reached verdict on Jesus. Surprisingly and unlike his parents, however, the man is ready to take risks in acknowledging the truth he has found. The man's account of the Jews as οὐκ ἠκούσατε confirms once again the Jews' sustained obstinacy. As previously noted, the virtue of right listening is not only crucial for right living but is also seen as "the posture of discipleship"[48] in John's Gospel. What that signifies is that unwillingness to listen to Jesus is tantamount to remaining in darkness (8:12) and thus placing self-inflicted condemnation on oneself (3:18–19).[49] The man's question to the Jews whether they also want to become Jesus's disciples (9:27) is a rhetorically powerful statement since the man not only functions as a witness but also as a judge on behalf of Jesus by both accusing and challenging the Jews on the issue of their unbelief. The man's

45 Schnackenburg argues that such a phrase "has a particular application to situations in which people admit their guilt before God (cf. Jos. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5; 2 Chron. 30:8; Jer. 13:16)." Schnackenburg, *John*, 11:251.

46 Their overconfidence on what they know reminds readers of Nicodemus who also claims (confidently) to know who Jesus is (3:2).

47 It is not incidental that the Jews keep calling Jesus 'ἄνθρωπος' (also in 9:16) in order to degrade Jesus to the same level as that of the blind man (9:1). Philip L. Tite, "A Community in Conflict: A Literary and Historical Reading of John 9," *RelStTh* 15 (1997): 77–100 (86).

48 Holleran, "John 9," 373.

49 Holleran, "John 9," ibid.

question to the Jews seems even absurd since it was his last opportunity to pull himself out of that thorny spot by either remaining silent about or denying the connection between his healing and Jesus, but he rather made himself the object of contempt and even put the rest of his family in danger by asking the question that was not demanded of him.

Most commentators do not see the significance of the man's action at this point. However, the man's question to Jesus's opponents in v. 27 could be viewed not as a reckless move but rather as an act of bravery and integrity. For example, Plutarch in the *Life of Romulus* describes what is expected of those who are in a patronage relationship.

> [H]e separated the nobles from multitude, calling the one 'patrons,' that is to say, protectors, and the other 'clients,' that is to say, dependants. At the same time he inspired both classes with an astonishing goodwill towards each other, and one which became the basis of important rights and privileges. For the patrons advised their clients in matters of custom, and represented them in courts of justice, in short, were their counsellors and friends in all things; while the clients were devoted to their patrons, not only holding them in honour, but actually, in cases of poverty, helping them to dower their daughters and pay their debts. And there was neither any law nor any magistrate that could compel a patron to bear witness against a client, or a client against a patron.
>
> *Rom.* 13. 2

Some of the important responsibilities of this patronage relationship were not to bear false witness against each other and to support each other in times of hardship—these virtues are highly valued in discipleship as will be seen later. Clients and patrons are to honour each other in all circumstances even at one's own risk, and thus patronage relationship is not only a social phenomenon but also carries moral obligations. Though Jesus and the healed man are not in a patron-client relationship in a strict sense, their relationship could be understood broadly through the notion of patronage since Jesus gives the man sight and the man defends Jesus in return. Yet this is not simply a give and take scenario because the man seems to stand up genuinely for Jesus as he comes to realise Jesus's identity. Then the man's bold question to the opponents could be seen as resisting bearing false witness against Jesus, whereas the Jews dishonour God by persecuting the one sent by God.[50] It seems as though the man's

50 Bruce J. Malina et al., *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 118.

perception of Jesus becomes ever clearer while the "hardening opposition of Jews/Pharisees is treated as a developing blindness."[51]

The man's question causes the opponents to become furious (λοιδορέω) and to be united once again under the name of Moses. The emphatic use of σὺ and ἡμεῖς in 9:28 shows the Jews' determination to have their identity defined by their relationship to Moses, but readers know by now how foolish the Jews' answer is as the readers' understanding of the role of Moses has been enlightened tremendously through John 5–7. In John 5 Moses becomes the accuser of those who do not believe in Jesus, in John 6 readers learn about "God's superior provision in Jesus"[52] compared to that of Moses, and in John 7 Moses supports Jesus's healing on the Sabbath. Put differently, Moses is nothing more than an instrument of God whose role is to witness to Jesus (5:46) and "any who claim to embrace Moses should follow Christ."[53] With this understanding, readers continue to see the absurdity of the Jews' comment on Jesus: "we know (ἡμεῖς οἴδαμεν) that God spoke to Moses; as for this man (τοῦτον),[54] we do not know where he is from" (9:29).

The man, however, points out the essence of the issue for the Jews; what matters right now is not the origin of Jesus but the fact that he healed the blind man from birth. In other words, even without knowing where Jesus is from, the Jews must somehow make sense of what has happened to the man and what that means for them. The Jews have been trying to pretend as if the healing were a mirage, but the man's use of οἴδαμεν in 9:31 ultimately closes the only exit for the Jews since the man is now arguing based on Jewish tradition that the Jews must respect. Since the healing is an undeniable fact, the Jews must admit that Jesus is sent by God, otherwise they are in danger of denying their own tradition because no one has done anything like what Jesus did since the world began (9:32). The conclusion the man draws for the Jews is so strikingly insightful and irrefutable that it becomes impossible for the Jews to respond without contradicting their own identity. As the Jews run out of resources in terms of argument, they accuse the man of having been born completely in sin and yet for teaching them. Even that argument cannot stand since the fact that the man now sees confirms that whatever his or his parents'

51 John Painter, "John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," *JSNT* 28 (1986): 31–61 (31).

52 Stan Harstine, *Moses as a Character in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 229; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 64.

53 Christopher A. Maronde, "Moses in the Gospel of John," *CTQ* 77 (2013): 23–44 (34).

54 Though such a pronoun carries a neutral meaning at a semantic level, the fact that these terms are used heavily by Jesus's enemies show that they are used negatively in the Gospel: ἐκεῖνος (7:11; 9:12; 19:21); οὗτος (6:42, 52; 7:27, 35; 9:16). Michaels, *John*, 559.

sins might have been, they are now forgiven. The Jews cannot take the truth any more and the man is expelled from the synagogue (9:34).[55]

2.4 *Ethical Analysis of vv. 35–41*

As the man has been courageous and faithful in defending Jesus, it is now Jesus's turn to comfort him with the gift that surpasses the gift of sight. The mutual, reciprocal relationship between Jesus and the man becomes even more pronounced as Jesus himself goes out to find him. The whole picture of the man losing his place in his socio-religious home, even abandoned by his own parents, is counterbalanced by Jesus offering him a new reality in which the man is invited to partake in a life of discipleship. Upon finding the man, Jesus immediately asks a question that will take the man even further in "his journey to sight."[56] The question in v. 35, "Do you believe in the Son of Man (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)?" invites a wide range of questions from scholars since the title τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου[57] has not been used as the object of belief until this point (cf. Son of God, 1.34, 49; 3:18; 11:27; 20:31). Though it is not clear whether the man understands the term τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as a christological title, it is clear that the man is willing to find out more about the truth that lies before him (9:36).

As Jesus reveals who that Son of Man is, the man shows a similar reaction to which readers have seen from the Samaritan woman back in ch. 4; the woman left her jar to share the news with her townspeople and the formerly blind man expresses a similar intensity of interest and respect by prostrating (προσκυνέω) himself before Jesus.[58] The man's belief in Jesus reaches its peak

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55 Though Martyn's view of John's gospel as a two level drama has been influential, there is enough evidence to show that opposition against Jesus and his followers was real and present in Jesus's lifetime. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 24ff. For a persuasive refutation of Martyn's argument, see Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (SNTSMS 141; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115–147.

56 Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 129.

57 In some textual witnesses τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ($P^{66.75}$ ℵ B D Wpc) is replaced by τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (A L Θ ψ 070. 0250). Though a scholar like Bligh (John S.J. Bligh, "Four Studies in John I: The Man Born Blind," *HeyJ* 7 (1966): 129–144 (141–142)) supports the latter reading, there is a good deal of external evidence that deters such a possibility, and Steegen argues persuasively that the title 'Son of Man' becomes a christological title in light of the larger context of the Gospel. See Steegen Martijn, "To Worship the Johannine "Son of Man". John 9,38 as Refocusing on the Father," *Bib* 91 (2010): 534–554.

58 Keener argues that though the man's gesture itself may not "indicate worship of a deity; but in its broader Johannine context (4:20–24; 12:20–21), including John's Christology (1:1, 18; 20:28), it fits the Johannine portrait of Jesus's deity and invites John's own audience to worship Jesus." Keener, *John*, 1:795.

in his confession in 9:38, πιστεύω, κύριε, which is rightly interpreted by most commentators as "*Lord*, I believe." The man's understanding of Jesus's identity has been progressing steadily from a prophet (9:17), to sir (9:36), and ultimately to Lord (9:38). The man has made thus far not because his spiritual journey towards Jesus was any less difficult for him but because he was resolute about his own experience of healing and willingness to face difficulties for the sake of truth. Such narratival descriptions of the man's progress show that a simple deterministic reading undermines John's sophisticated literary technique of presenting salvation as a process of actively but humbly seeking truth and courageously facing opposition along the way.

It is interesting to note that the word προσκυνέω has appeared so far only in ch. 4 where Jesus engages in a dialogue with the Samaritan woman on the topic of worship. There Jesus makes it plainly clear that one of Jesus's urgent tasks commissioned by the Father is to find those who would worship him in spirit and truth (4:23–24). Careful readers would realise that the context in which the verb προσκυνέω appears in ch. 4 is almost the same as the one readers find in ch. 9; both the Samaritan woman and the blind man finally come to fulfill the work of God (9:4) by believing in Jesus. Such an evaluation is even more worldview-shattering because one of the most spiritual vocabularies in the Gospel is being used and applied to the most unusual characters in the most unusual places. True worship is not found among the religious leaders in the temple of Jerusalem but rather among those who are the socially vulnerable and often religiously excluded in the places where true worship is least likely to be observed—the land of Samaria and a dust-filled road.

John now brings out a greater spiritual truth to readers through a notion of judgment that has been repetitively introduced in the last four chapters. Such a repetitive use re-establishes judgment as the only outcome for loving darkness more than light. Jesus seems to contradict himself by claiming to enter the world for judgment (9:39) since in 3:17 Jesus says that God did not send the Son into the world for judgment. However, 3:17 is also immediately followed by the words of judgment, and "since faith and obedience are involved in salvation, judgment on rejectors and the wilful is an unavoidable concomitant of God's will to save."[59] In fact, it is the Jews' love of or destructive competitiveness for glory (5:44; 7:18; 12:43; cf. 11:48) that has blinded their eyes to the revelation of God in Jesus.

As already seen in ch. 3 where John's disciples worry about losing popularity among people due to Jesus's increasing fame, the Pharisees also seem to regard Jesus as a threat to their authority and the glory they enjoy from

59 Beasley-Murray, *John*, 160.

the social and religious hierarchy. It is almost as if the Pharisees are competing against Jesus for honour (glory), which was considered a 'limited good' in the ancient world. Such resentful competitiveness for glory is firmly judged not only in the Gospel but also in the writings of Plutarch. Plutarch, for example, describes those who love "trophies and triumphs" coming from φιλονικία (love of victory)[60] as being blind (τυφλός) (*Pomp*. 70. 1) and makes even harsher judgments on those who snatch glory from others' hands (*Pomp*. 31.2; 35.2). Though the Jews may think it is Jesus who takes away their well-deserved honour and glory, readers know, however, that it is the other way around. Plutarch warns his readers that one's obsessive desire for glory coupled with craving for approval from people "destroys those who cannot limit it"[61] and it is the Pharisees' obsessive desire for glory and approval from people that gets in the way of their coming to Jesus. Therefore, Lieu rightly notes that "the answer of John 9 excludes any direct predeterminism; the effect of Jesus's coming was indeed that some were constituted blind while others received their sight, but it is their response which so constituted them."[62]

Now readers see a role reversal—the blind became the sighted and the claiming-to-be sighted end up being blind. The Pharisees who should be the spiritual guide for the people of Israel have become a stumbling block since they "regard their own illumination as sufficient"[63] and are satisfied with "the light of the law as interpreted by [their] received traditions."[64] By contrast, the man has set himself as an ideal example of faith since by "responding to the words of Jesus, he came to see (ἦλθεν βλέπων, v. 7; cf. vv. 11, 15), to know (ἐν οἶδα ὅτι τυφλὸς ὢν ἄρτι βλέπω, v. 25), and to believe (πιστεύω, κύριε, v. 38)."[65] The Pharisees' question in v. 40 still shows their ignorance; "We are not also blind, are we?" The Pharisees judge only by appearances and thus are able to discern only the physical reality in which they conceive themselves as physically sound. On the other hand, the man does not only acknowledge his physical blindness but is also willing to see the light of truth that can only be reached by probing into spiritual reality. The final verdict is clear and firm; "εἰ τυφλοὶ ἦτε, οὐκ ἂν εἴχετε ἁμαρτίαν· νῦν δὲ λέγετε ὅτι βλέπομεν, ἡ ἁμαρτία ὑμῶν μένει" (9:41). What started

60 Plutarch does not always view φιλονικία as a negative disposition but sometimes sees it necessary in case of a youth giving one's utmost to win a contest (*Lyc*. 16.9). For the use of φιλονικία in Plutarch's writings, see Philip A. Stadter, "Competition and its Costs: φιλονικία in Plutarch's Society and Heroes," *Virtues*, 237–255.

61 Stadter, "Competition," 250.

62 Judith M. Lieu, "Blindness in the Johannine Tradition," *NTS* 34 (1988): 83–95 (84).

63 Barrett, *John*, 366.

64 Carson, *John*, 378.

65 Holleran, "John 9," 381.

as a trial against the man and Jesus has ended up as a trial against the Pharisees. The readers who remember Jesus's initial request to the man in 9:4 to do the works of God are also encouraged to evaluate themselves in light of the progress the man has made and to decide whether to follow the route of the Pharisees or of the man, for there is no middle grounds.

3 Conclusion

The story of the blind man is as radical and worldview-transforming as the story of the Samaritan woman since the man who seemed most inadequate and unqualified to do the works of God has become the role model *par excellence* of discipleship for both witnesses and readers. The blind man's obedience and perseverance have made his physical blindness a means by which the works of God were manifested in Jesus, and the man's earnest search for truth is sharply contrasted with the opponents' hardened mindset that refuses to accept anything contrary to their status quo. As seen in the narrative, John does not endorse a blind belief in Jesus but wants his readers to evaluate all the evidence before them and to come to a decision of faith as exemplified by the blind man. In that respect, salvation in a Johannine sense is not simply given to those who have been predetermined by God but is bestowed on those who consciously and deliberately choose to move out of spiritual darkness to the saving light. In fact, salvation is not an end-product of either predeterminism or free will but a mysterious combination of the two; the Gospel neither denies God's sovereignty in bringing people to his Son nor ignores a person's free will to accept Jesus.

More importantly, the analysis of this particular story in light of Plutarch's writings confirms that one's progress in discipleship is always accompanied by moral progress. As seen in the previous chapters, following Jesus is more than simply changing an object of worship but calls for a complete reorientation of one's whole being including values and behaviour. For example, following Jesus requires radical obedience, which demands right listening based on patience and humility (versus the Jews whose listening is distorted by envy), and a virtue of bravery and integrity in order to stand up for truth instead of giving in to the threat of expulsion by bearing false testimony against Jesus. Such ethical evaluations are useful in understanding how unbelief is not only a spiritual failure but also an ethical failure by exposing the undercurrent motives behind it. The blind man is no longer blind both spiritually and physically because he made a bold move towards the light, whereas the Pharisees are now confirmed to be spiritually blind despite their ability to see Jesus and his signs.

Summary of Part 1

Before moving on to the second part of this study, it would be helpful to summarise what has been achieved so far by the ethical analysis of our chosen passages. In Chapter 2 I have argued that there is an intimate relationship or interplay between discipleship and moral progress since the advancement of one's knowledge of Jesus's identity and mission is closely linked to a new way of thinking and living. Our investigation has shown that discipleship normally begins with witnessing Jesus's signs[1] or hearing Jesus's teachings (or sometimes others' testimonies about Jesus) about his identity, mission and relationship to the Father. Jesus's teachings are often scandalous in many respects as seen in the struggle by Nicodemus and also in the rising conflict between Jesus and the opponents that began in ch. 5. In fact, Jesus's teachings and actions are not only counter-cultural (e.g. temple cleansing, a high view of women,[2] inclusion of outsiders and social outcasts, insufficiency of the law, a negative description of the Pharisees, etc.) but also subversive to those who are consumed with keeping their religious/social status quo. Such characteristics of Jesus's teachings and actions signify the fact that one's belief in Jesus always results in transformation that goes way beyond the religious/spiritual realm. Furthermore, the ethical analysis of our chosen passages has shown that unbelief in John's Gospel is closely connected to one's love for darkness (3:19), popularity (3:26; 12:19), glory (5:44; 12:43), and a wilful rejection of Jesus's words (9:27; 10:25); all of these traits are described both in the Gospel and in Plutarch's writings as associated with the consequences of unethical motives.

The comparison of the Gospel with Plutarch's writings has also revealed many of the ethical attitudes that readers are expected to embrace; one cannot simply come to believe in Jesus without being transformed in the way one thinks and behaves. As seen in Chapter 2 the process of conversion to a philosophical school or religion was considered to be an ethical process in the Greco-Roman world, and such progress is clearly seen in the first half of the

1 On the relationship between signs and faith, see Marianne Meye Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," *BBR* 1 (1991): 89–108.

2 Besides the Samaritan woman, readers will see that the author continuously portrays women favourably throughtout the Gospel. For example, Mary is portrayed as a model of true discipleship who not only offers Jesus her most precious possession but also prophetically prepares for the upcoming death of Jesus. Furthermore, Mary Magdalene is the only disciple who visits Jesus's tomb after his crucifixion, meets the resurrected Jesus before anyone else does, and more importantly, announces the news of Jesus's resurrection to other disciples.

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Gospel as John tries to bring readers not only to a new belief but also to a new way of life. As seen so far, the narrative has the power to help readers to enter into the narrative world by interacting imaginatively with different characters and placing themselves in the setting and the plot of the story through which readers interpret their own experiences and values. Thus if readers have been meaningfully interacting with the stories of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man in the Gospel, they would find it almost impossible to read through the first half of the Gospel without being challenged to transform their understanding of Jesus's identity and ultimately their moral worldview.

Ancient narratives were never meant to be ethically neutral and consequently every element of narrative such as plot, style, setting, characters, etc. is ethically charged to shape and transform the mind, desires and imagination of readers. In this sense, moral norms that are presented in "a series of punctiliar or atomic acts, unconnected to character, and the environment that forms character"[3] are not only "an impoverished morality,"[4] but also leave out important parts of human nature, namely, imagination and empathy. Such a transformative power of narrative enables readers to engage the story not as passive spectators but as active participants who are expected to align themselves with the view of the narrator and the worldview presented by the narratives.

Immediately after the story of a man born blind, readers are introduced to the parable of the Good Shepherd who, unlike a thief and a robber, shows boundless love by laying down (τίθημι) his own life for (ὑπέρ) his sheep. Here the Good Shepherd (Jesus) is sharply contrasted against hired workers (Jewish leaders) who, instead of protecting the sheep from wild beasts, run away when faced with imminent life-threatening dangers (10:11–13). Trozzo helpfully argues that in light of the OT contexts, Jesus's role as Good Shepherd gains even more significance since Jesus is not only portrayed as a good shepherd like Moses or Joshua who sacrificially rescues the people of Israel from the hands of enemies (Num 27:16–17) but also as the awaited Davidic Messiah (Ezk 34:23; cf. Pss 78:70–72; 79:13; 80:2; 95:7; 100:3; Jer 23:4–6; Mic 5:2–4) whose life and death will be for the benefit of the sheep.[5] The author's purpose of placing this particular parable at this point of narrative seems rhetorically intentional and effective since Jesus's selfless protection over his own sheep is in stark contrast not only to the sordid selfishness of the Jewish leaders but also to the self-seeking attitude of the parents of a man born blind. When the danger of

3 Alexander Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 11.

4 Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology*, 5.

5 Trozzo, *Exploring Johannine Ethics*, 74–75.

excommunication from the synagogue looms large, the parents are afraid of standing up in defense of their own powerless son but rather withdraw into the background in fear, leaving their son in isolation like an orphan (*contra* 14:18).

Despite tangible threats from the opponents, however, Jesus as the Good Shepherd comes back to the hostile territory out of his love and compassion for the man to disclose his divine identity (9:37) and to invite him to the life of discipleship (cf. the Samaritan woman). Such profound love of Jesus is once again beautifully depicted in the raising of Lazarus where Jesus not only proves himself as the resurrection and the life (11:25) but also Jesus's love for Lazarus brings Jesus himself nearer to death (11:53). Jesus's sacrificial love for his own is now properly acknowledged and returned by Mary whose anointing of Jesus's feet with expensive perfume symbolically foreshadows Jesus's impending suffering and death (12:3). Here readers see another *synkrisis* between Mary and Judas Iscariot: the former displays her *genuine* faith and devotion to Jesus by offering her most costly treasure, whereas the latter tries to steal that treasure away from Mary and thus from Jesus for his own selfish benefits through his *fake* compassion for the poor (12:6).

Coming to the last portion of the *Book of Signs* (12:20–50), John is giving both the retrospective summary of what readers have read in the first twelve chapters (12:37–50) and the anticipatory summary of the various themes that readers will encounter in the next half of the Gospel (12:20–36).[6] In the anticipatory section, readers are introduced to the approaching death of Jesus, which is explicitly portrayed as being 'glorified' (12:23) and 'lifted up' (12:32, 34). At this point, Jesus finally makes it plain to his followers that the hour of his death (glorification) is at hand and that he must embrace this soul-troubling suffering because he is sent by the Father for this very moment (12:27). The consequences of Jesus's death and resurrection are threefold.

First, the ruler of this world will be cast out and will be rightly judged by the Father (12:31). Jesus later confirms the absolute powerlessness of the ruler of this world in 14:30 where Jesus proclaims that the ruler has no claim on him. Second, Jesus's ministry on earth including his death on the cross carries universal implications. Such a presumption is not unlikely since a mention of some Greeks coming to Jesus in 12:20 appears immediately after Pharisees' remark in 12:19 where the world is said to have gone after Jesus. Though there is much debate as to whether Ἕλληνές in 12:20 refers to Greek-speaking Jews or Gentiles, Jesus's inclusive remark in 12:32 may indicate the universal scope of Jesus's ministry. Such an assumption is further confirmed by the fact that

6 Bruce W. Longenecker, *Rhetoric at the Boundaries: The Art and Theology of New Testament Chain-Link Transitions* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 123.

Jesus offers the gift of salvation to a Jew (Nicodemus; 3:1–21), a half-Jew (4:1–42; the Samaritan woman) and to a non-Jew (the royal officer; 4:46–54).[7] Lastly, Jesus is not the only one who is depicted as a grain of wheat that must die in order to bear fruit but his disciples are also expected to share in their teacher's destiny by losing and hating their life in this world (12:25). One's belief in Jesus must be more than merely paying lip-service but must be accompanied by one's willingness to follow Jesus all the way to the cross. In other words, "the believer arrives at the same place as Jesus as the result of following him."[8] As Jesus's earthly ministry is fast coming to an end, Jesus reminds his disciples of the sacrificial nature of discipleship and also of a reward that awaits them for remaining faithful to Jesus's calling (12:26b).

Having informed readers of the themes that they will meet in the following chapters, John now recapitulates what has been said in the first twelve chapters (12:37–50). Readers at this point may be perplexed about the persistent unbelief of the people and the lack of courage to publicly believe in Jesus (12:36–43) despite witnessing Jesus's wondrous power in various signs including the Lazarus incident. Some readers may be confused as to what to make of the prolonged and stubborn resistance of Jesus's opponents and may wonder whether some people are indeed predestined by God to damnation from the very beginning. In fact, John quotes Isa 6:10 with some minor variations to give the reason for the Jews' unbelief in 12:40: τετύφλωκεν αὐτῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐπώρωσεν αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν. The use of the third person singular perfective verbs (τετύφλωκεν and ἐπώρωσεν) seems to advocate that God is the source of the Jews' hardening hearts. Readers who have carefully read up to ch. 9 might be also struck by the unique Johannine language, which seems to highlight the divine sovereignty over one's ability to believe in Jesus. Such language is not uncommon in the Gospel as seen in 3:27; 5:21; 6:37, 44, 64–65, 70; 12:39–41; 15:18–19; 17:6. Those who support a deterministic reading argue that John writes the narrative within the conceptual framework of fixed origins.[9] In other words, one comes to believe in Jesus because he or she is predetermined by God to do so.

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7 Michael J. Gorman, "John's Impicit Ethic of Enemy Love," in *Johannine Ethics*, 135–158 (141).

8 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 87.

9 For those who follow such a reading, see Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Born From Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John* (WUNT 29; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992); Emmanuel O. Tukasi, *Determinism and Petitionary Prayer in John and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Ideological Reading of John and the Rule of the Community* (*1QS*) (LSTS 66; London T&T Clark, 2008). See Carson for a more balanced reading, D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical perspectives in tension* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981).

Though this is too profound a topic to be meaningfully discussed in this limited section, it is important to note that such a deterministic reading may be prominent but it is not necessarily fundamental.[10] Thus one should not be easily carried away by those passages which have deterministic nuances, but one must understand them in light of other passages that clearly describe faith in terms of responding voluntarily and actively to Jesus's invitation (1:12; 3:11, 32; 4:39; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 47; 8:24; 8:31).[11] Anderson writes helpfully about the tension between determinism and free will in John's Gospel as follows:[12]

> [T]he point is not divine permissibility; it is the insufficiency of the human initiative in apprehending and responding to the Revealer in faith. No one has seen God at any time (1:18; 5:37; 6:46); without God's self-disclosure, human contrivances are of no avail. Therefore, the tension in John is not between determinism and free will; it is between human willingness to respond in faith to the divine initiative, which alone is the way to God, versus the temptation to rely on platforms of human initiative.

Furthermore, the prologue, which sets the tone for the rest of the Gospel, introduces Jesus as the true light who ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον (1:9 cf. 3:16–17; 6:39). If John's purpose of writing this Gospel were to simply give his readers only a one-dimensional depiction of belief and unbelief in a framework of fixed origins, it would be a huge waste of energy and creativity on the part of John himself to write such a long series of sophisticated dialogues.

As seen in ch. 9, the Jews' unbelief cannot be simply blamed on a predetermined destiny since "seeking one's glory rather than the glory of God manifests itself in willful infidelity to one's own experience, in bearing false witness in the face of the truth … because it threatens the religious or political status quo (11:48)."[13] Since the Gospel presents enough evidence both for divine sovereignty and human responsibility, one must be careful not to dismiss one position at the expense of another. Lindars' comment on 6:37, which contains the most powerful deterministic nuance in the Gospel, is insightful: "It is natural that here, as also in 17:2, we should from these words conclude that some are

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10 Marianne Meye Thompson, "Review of Jeffrey Trumbower, *Born from Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John*," *JBL* 113 (1994): 157–159 (159).

11 Kysar sees a clear presence of both divine and human responsibility even in John 6, which has the strongest deterministic voice in the Gospel. Robert Kysar, "Pursuing the Paradoxes of Johannine Thought," in *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 43–52.

12 Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 36.

13 Schneiders, "John 9," 189–209 (206).

predestined by God to salvation, and others not; but it should be observed that only the positive side is mentioned. We should, then be on our guard against reading a rigid doctrine of predestination into the verse."[14]

After all, the quotation of Isa 6:10 in 12:40 is immediately followed by another reason for the Jews' unbelief: ἠγάπησαν γὰρ τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων μᾶλλον ἤπερ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ (12:43). Readers can now easily notice the parallel between 3:19 (ἠγάπησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς) and 12:43 (ἠγάπησαν γὰρ τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων μᾶλλον ἤπερ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ), where the glory of men is connected with darkness and the glory of God with light. In other words, people choose darkness because they love the glory of men more than the glory of God, and such a summary statement at the closure of Jesus's public ministry confirms that unbelief is the result of humans' love for their own glory. In 12:44–50 the narrator beautifully recaptures the main themes in the first half of the Gospel through the words of Jesus that function both as a word of warning and exhortation to readers. In fact, Jesus's last remark in the *Book of Signs* (12:44–50) should strike readers in full force since the illegitimacy and cowardice of the Pharisees have been made crystal clear along the way, especially in the discourse of the Good Shepherd (10:10, 13), whereas Jesus's divine authority as God's sent one has been fully displayed in the raising of Lazarus (11:17–44).

As we come to the end of the *Book of Signs*, it is important to note that readers are not to remain neutral but are expected to respond to the reading either positively or negatively. Plutarch, for example, expects his readers to engage with the characters in his biographies in personal terms in order to "fashion and adorn [themselves] in conformity with the virtues therein depicted (*Aem*. 1.1)." Plutarch further encourages his readers to treat the heroes in his biographies as their personal guests whose examples readers must decide either to embrace or reject: "The result is like nothing else than daily living and associating together, when I receive and welcome each subject of my history in turn as my guest, so to speak, and observe carefully "how large he was and of what mien" and select from his deeds what is most important and most beautiful to know (*Aem* 1.2)." Similarly, John expects his readers to interact with the characters presented in the first twelve chapters in a way that brings about practical consequences—belief or unbelief in Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus's messianic signs in his public ministry powerfully testify to God's glory revealed in Jesus as God's sent one.

John's readers are now presented with evidence in full scale and must make up their minds as whether to continue in their journey to becoming one of Jesus's disciples or one of Jesus's opponents (cf. 10:37–38). As John the Baptist

14 Lindars, *John*, 260–261.

cried out (κράζω) in witnessing Jesus to the world in 1:15, Jesus himself cries out (κράζω, 12:44) at the end of his public ministry to urge people to move out of darkness to light (12:46). Only those who make such a move can bear to hear and do what Jesus is about to reveal in the *Book of Glory*.

PART 2

Moral Transformation in Behaviour

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CHAPTER 6

Embodying Christlikeness

1 Imitation of Jesus

Entering into the second half of the Gospel, readers are confronted with a new literary setting in which all other characters except Jesus and his disciples recede into the background. Such a change in setting has been already hinted at in 12:23 where Jesus claims that his time to be glorified is drawing near, and the narrator makes it explicit in 13:1 that the time for Jesus's departure has finally arrived. Having sensed his fast-approaching death, Jesus gathers his disciples for the last supper[1] during which he washes the disciples' feet and imparts the final words of farewell. Though most scholars agree that Jesus's farewell speech[2] belongs to a common literary genre in the ancient world, they differ greatly when it comes to the source of the Johannine Farewell Discourse. The reason for such disagreement is due to the fact that the farewell discourse genre is well attested both in Jewish and Greco-Roman sources.[3] Holloway rightly notes, however, that it would be unlikely that John by employing a certain model would have "consciously turned his back on [other traditions], or for that matter that he was even aware of employing one type of death scene versus another."[4]

1 In the NT meals often function as an important occasion for identity formation. See Esther Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context* (BibInt 109; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

2 The term 'farewell speech' in this study refers to Jesus's speech found in 13:31–17:26. The literature on the Farewell Discourse is massive, and different approaches have been applied to this pericope. For a comprehensive review of the literature and various methodologies, see John Carlson Stube, *A Graeco-Roman Rhetorical Reading of the Farewell Discourse* (LNTS 309; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 5–34; Fernando F. Segovia, *The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1–58; L. Scott Kellum, *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse* (JSNTS 256; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 10–78.

3 For a helpful analysis of the literary affinity of the Johannine Farewell Discourse in both Jewish and Greco–Roman sources, see Ruth Sheridan, "The Paraclete as Successor in the Johannine Farewell Discourse: A Comparative Literary Analysis," *AEJT* 18.2 (2011): 129–140.

4 Paul A. Holloway, "Left Behind: Jesus's Consolation of His Disciples in John 13,31–17,26," *ZNW* 96 (2005): 1–34 (2, n. 6). Along with Holloway and Stube (mentioned in n. 2), Parsenios also argues that the Johannine Farewell Discourse borrows its structure and motifs from Greco-Roman literature. George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell*

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Despite differences in compositional details between Jewish and Greco-Roman farewell speeches, there was a common literary trait that was consistently found in both traditions, namely, an exhortation to ethical behaviour.[5] Readers who are familiar with Jewish or Greco-Roman farewell discourses may find John's version of the farewell discourse a bit unusual at least in that the Johannine Farewell Discourse does not begin with speech but with action—Jesus acts before he speaks (13:4–5). Though most ancient farewell discourses include exhortations to keep ethical instructions, it is rare that a teacher actually does something for his disciples as an example[6] (ὑπόδειγμα, 13:15) to follow right before his departure or death.

Though various characters are portrayed in the first half of the Gospel as positive examples in terms of both leading readers to Jesus and displaying moral traits that are essential for discipleship, the fact that ὑπόδειγμα is used only in reference to Jesus in the entire Gospel signifies that Jesus himself is the example *par excellence* for the disciples and readers. It is important to add that Plutarch often slows down the flow of the story when he wants "to place a fermata, as it were, on the hero's excellence."[7] Similarly, the narrative time slows down significantly as the story reaches the Farewell Discourse, and the fact that the footwashing episode is placed at the beginning of the Farewell Discourse shows that Jesus's footwashing plays a strategic role not only in setting the tone and context for the rest of the Farewell Discourse but also in introducing readers to the notion of 'imitation'[8] as an instrument for moral formation. This chap-

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Discourse in Light of Greco-Roman Literature (NovT 117; Leiden: Brill, 2005). On the contrary, Bammel argues for Jewish tradition behind the Johannine Farewell Discourse. Ernst Bammel, "The Farewell Discourse of the Evangelist John and Its Jewish Heritage," *TynBul* 44.1 (1993): 103–116.

5 Sheridan, "Paraclete," 132, 138.

6 Though παράδειγμα is preferred by the Atticistis, ὑπόδειγμα is found in 2 Macc 6:28, 6:31 and 4 Macc 17:23 where an exemplary death is called for. See R. Alan Culpepper, "The Johannine Hypodeigma: A Reading of John 13," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 133–149 (142). Cf. For a comprehensive discussion on imitation, see Willis P. de Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1962).

7 Maarten De Pourcq and Geert Roskam, "Mirroring virtues in Plutarch's Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi." in *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization* (ed. Koen De Temmerman and Kristoffel Demoen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 163–180 (167).

8 Though some scholars argue that the term 'imitation' is misleading since it brings an image of "uncreative copying" to modern readers, I use it since the term has been widely used in NT ethics. I do not make a distinction between imitation and emulation as some scholars do. See E.J. Tinsley, "Some Principles for Reconstructing a Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ," *SJT* 25 (1972): 45–57 (47).

ter will be twofold in its aim: (1) the first part of this chapter will examine the ancient notion of imitation within the context of the footwashing episode; (2) it will then move onto a detailed analysis of the central traits that Jesus want his disciples to embrace.

1.1 *Ancient Understanding of Imitation*

1.1.1 The Footwashing as a Hermeneutical Entry into Imitation

This particular section is not intended to exegete the entire pericope of the footwashing; a detailed analysis of it will be undertaken later in the section on love. The following discussion will focus, however, on the way it prepares readers for Jesus's upcoming exhortation to imitate him. Most commentators agree that the farewell speech proper begins in 13:31. What then is the function of John 13:1–30 in the Farewell Discourse? From the literary perspective, the unity of this particular pericope in relation to the whole Farewell Discourse can be maintained within the notion of discipleship.[9] The idea of discipleship has been highlighted in the first part of the Gospel in terms of cognitive recognition of Jesus's identity and ministry. As seen in our previous discussion in Part 1, John writes his narratives in order to bring his readers to a better understanding of Jesus's identity and mission, which is the beginning stage of discipleship.

If readers have been reading closely up to ch. 12 according to John's rhetorical intentions, they are encouraged to make up their mind as to continue in their journey of discipleship or to turn back as many of Jesus's disciples did (6:66). Those who decide to make a commitment to Jesus and to read further into the Farewell Discourse find that the notion of discipleship is taken a step further. Jesus no longer demands that his disciples simply believe in him but imitate him. It is important to note that unlike readers who read the Gospel from the post-resurrection perspective, Jesus's disciples still do not have a satisfactory understanding of Jesus's identity and ministry since Jesus is not yet glorified at this point of narrative (12:16; 13:7; 16:18). Despite the disciples' continued misunderstanding, it has been made clear to readers that the journey of discipleship is more than just coming to know who Jesus is or having one's worldview changed but is rather culminated in imitating Jesus.[10]

Such a change is clearly seen in 13:17 where Jesus makes a distinction between 'knowing' and 'doing': "If you *know* (οἴδατε) these things, blessed are you

9 D.F. Tolmie, *Jesus's Farewell to the Disciples: John 13:1–17:26 in Narratological Perspective* (BibInt; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 72.

10 Similarly argued by Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 280.

if you *do* (ποιῆτε) them" (13:17).[11] The use of ποιέω in ch. 13 is different from its use in the *Book of Signs*. When the verb ποιέω is used with reference to Jesus in the first twelve chapters, Jesus's doing is primarily targeted to bringing people to faith in himself (2:11; 2:23; 4:29; 4:34; 4:45; 6:2; 6:14; 6:29; 7:17; 10:25; 10:37–38; 11:45) or revealing his identity as the Son of God or the one sent by the Father (5:20, 27, 30, 36; 6:38; 8:28). On the other hand, when the same verb is used in relation to an individual in the first twelve chapters, a person's doing usually refers to actions that lead either to belief or disbelief in Jesus (3:21; 6:28; 8:41; 8:44). Thus ποιέω (doing) in those passages mentioned above almost always carries soteriological connotations and depicts discipleship in terms of coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus. In light of this, 'knowing' (οἶδα) in 13:17 is equivalent to 'doing' (ποιέω) in the *Book of Signs* since the function of both words is to "portray discipleship as … one's knowledge of Jesus's identity."[12]

Coming to the *Book of Glory*, however, readers are introduced to a higher form of discipleship, which is evidenced by a fresh use of ποιέω with ethical implications that call for imitation (13:17).[13] Knowing who Jesus is and what he has done or will do is a crucial starting point for discipleship but one is blessed (μακάριος) if one can make progress in discipleship by imitating Jesus. I argue that this distinction between 'knowing' and 'doing' as seen in 13:17 and also in the heavy use of τηρέω[14] can provide a way for integrating two different interpretations in the footwashing pericope into a literary unity. The first interpretation appears in vv. 6–10, and the textual problem surrounding 13:10 makes this first interpretation difficult in determining exactly what the footwashing refers to. Those who support the shorter reading[15] by omitting εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας argue that λούω (bathe) and νίπτω (wash) are synonymous in meaning whereas those who support the longer reading[16] argue that 'bathing' and 'washing' represent two different kinds of cleansing.

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11 Jesus in 20:29 makes another similar distinction where Jesus treats belief without seeing signs as more praiseworthy than belief with seeing signs.

12 Hera, *Discipleship*, 86.

13 Though Bennema does not specifically use the word 'progress', he also emphasises a progressive nature of discipleship where "mimesis is the goal of following Jesus." Cornelis Bennema, "Mimetic Ethics in the Gospel of John," in *Metapher—Narratio—Mimesis—Doxologie* (eds. Ulrich Volp, et al.; WUNT Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 205–217 (208). I thank Cornelis for providing me with the pre-publication copy of his chapter.

14 The notion of keeping Jesus's words (τηρέω, 14:15, 21, 23–24; 15:10, 20; 17:6) becomes prominent in the second half and is closely connected with loving Jesus.

15 Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (2 vols.; London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 2:514–515; Bultmann, *John*, 469; Barrett, *John*, 441–442; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 2:567–568; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 229, and others.

16 Carson, *John*, 464–466; Morris, *John*, 549; Lincoln, *John*, 360–370, and others.

Scholars over the centuries have proposed various interpretations of the footwashing such as baptism, the eucharist or Jesus's revelatory words in his earthly ministry.[17] It is interesting, however, that John uses the verb τίθημι in v. 4 to portray Jesus getting ready for footwashing. This particular verb was used 4 times in ch. 10 (10:11; 10:15; 10:17–18), all in reference to Jesus's voluntary death for others.[18] Thus this unique usage of the verb τίθημι as seen in ch. 10 would be still fresh in the readers' mind to mark the connection with Jesus's upcoming death as Jesus lays aside (τίθησιν) his outer garments to wash his disciples' feet. Furthermore, "Jesus's replies in vv. 7 and 8 [to Peter] point clearly to the future."[19] For these reasons, it is likely that the footwashing here symbolises Jesus's decisive act on the cross that brings about the complete cleansing for the believers. To be more specific, λούω refers to "the initial and fundamental cleansing"[20] accomplished by Jesus's atoning death which cannot be repeated, and νίπτω refers to the cleansing that should be continually performed for believers' ensuing sins. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to note that Jesus's footwashing should be understood as primarily based on Jesus's upcoming death on the cross especially in light of John's focus on Jesus's hour (13:1; cf. 2:4; 4:21; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23).[21]

The second interpretation in vv. 12–17 brings the act of footwashing, however, to a realm of moral teaching. Unlike the first interpretation that points to Jesus's impending death on the cross, the footwashing in light of the second interpretation takes a different meaning which highlights the virtue of humility[22] that comes from one's willingness to accept the scandalous nature of Jesus's act of footwashing and to relinquish any form of privilege and superiority for the sake of others.[23] Simply understanding the significance of Jesus's

17 Thomas suggests as many as seven different interpretations of Jesus's footwashing. John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (JSNTSup 61; Sheffield: Sheffied Academic, 1991), 11–18.

18 James D.G. Dunn, "The Washing of the Disciples' Feet in John 13 1–20," *ZNW* 61 (1970): 247–252 (248).

19 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (trans. David Smith and G.A. Kon; 3 vols.; London: Burns & Oates, 1982), III:22.

20 Carson, *John*, 465.

21 Chennattu helpfully comments that "the use of τίθημι in 13:4 suggests a thematic link between the footwashing and the death of Jesus, since the same verb τίθημι is used for the Good Shepherd 'laying down' his life for the sheep (10:11, 15, 17, 18). Similarly, the verb λαμβάνω is used to describe both Jesus's taking up of his outer garment after the footwashing (13:12) as well as the Good Shepherd's taking up of his life again (10:17, 18)." Chennattu, *Discipleship*, 93. Cf. Dunn, "Washing," 247–252 (248).

22 Carson, *John*, 465.

23 Schneiders evaluates three different models of serving and suggests that only the model of

footwashing is no longer adequate but the disciples must move on to imitate what Jesus has shown in his example of footwashing (13:15). To do so, the disciples must understand that Jesus's death carries not only salvific but also ethical significance, which radically transforms the contemporary social structure of hierarchy into a relationship that expresses "itself in joyful mutual service unto death."[24] In fact, true disciples "cannot expect another destiny than what their "master" … experienced (13:16)"[25] and thus the disciples have a moral obligation to follow the example set by the master.

After having presented the model of true discipleship through Jesus's footwashing, John immediately turns to false discipleship, which is highlighted by Judas' rejection of Jesus's love by leaving the room and entering into the darkness (1:5; 3:2; 8:12; 9:4; 11:10; 12:35; 13:30).[26] Unlike Judas who leaves Jesus, the beloved disciple is said to be ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησου (13:23, cf. 1:18), and such a stark contrast between Judas and the Beloved Disciple (ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 13:23) encourages readers to identify themselves with the latter by distancing themselves from the former. Then from a literary perspective, 13:1–30 sets the tone for the rest of the Farewell Discourse by giving readers a clear picture of both true and false discipleship.

1.1.2 Harmonization of the Two Different Interpretations

The question that arises at this point is whether these two interpretations can coexist within the footwashing pericope. The obvious difference in interpretation has led many scholars like Boismard, Richter, and Segovia to conclude that one of the interpretations must be a later addition by a redactor.[27] On the other hand, still many others have come up with a hypothesis that attempts to harmonise these two distinct and seemingly incompatible passages.[28] Weiser provides a helpful and balanced view, which sees the second moralistic interpretation originating from the first christological interpretation.[29] A similar pattern appears in 12:24–25 where a christological statement (v. 24) is followed

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friendship can truly transform the server's superiority into "an act of service, a revelation of self-giving love." Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Foot Washing (John 13:1–20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 76–92 (88).

24 Schneiders, "Foot Washing," 91.

25 Hera, *Discipleship*, 96.

26 For an ethical analysis of Judas as a character, see Wagener, *Figuren*, 413–492.

27 See M.-E. Boismard, "Le lavement des pieds (Jn, XIII, 1–17)," *RB* 71 (1964): 5–24; G. Richter, "Die Fusswaschung Joh 13,1–20," *MTZ* 16 (1965): 13–26; Fernando F. Segovia, "John 13:1–20, The Footwashing in the Johannine Tradition," *ZNW* 73 (1982): 31–51.

28 For a summary of those who take this approach, see Segovia, "Footwashing," 32–34.

29 A. Weiser, "Joh 13, 12–20 Zufügung eines späteren Herausgebers?," *BZ* 12 (1968): 252–257.

by a passage (v. 25) that helps readers understand the moral side (application) of the preceding christological statement. What this means is that it is not improbable that John uses the first interpretation as the theological (christological) basis for the second moralistic interpretation.

Such a pattern is also found in the Greco-Roman moral framework, which emphasises the importance of doctrines before precepts (see Chapter 2). Roskam succinctly explains the process by which one becomes morally mature and responsible in the Greco-Roman world.[30]

> [P]recepts are useful provided they are based on doctrines. When they remain unrelated to a more general perspective, they lack sufficient strength. Indeed, since precepts do not offer a deeper insight, they can never lead to virtue or wisdom on their own. Limiting oneself to precepts is therefore tantamount to regarding moral progress as τέλος. … A προκόπτον, then, is a man who gradually succeeds in following rationally based precepts, and at the same time gradually acquires a deeper insight into the philosophical doctrines on which those precepts are based and who is thus prepared for a final, radical change from absolute viciousness to perfect virtue.

In light of the ancient ethical dynamic that emphasises the role of doctrine before precept, John's placing of two different interpretations side by side, which could be categorised as doctrine (6–10) and precept (12–20), arguably follows this particular model of moral formation. Here some adjustment is needed: what readers find in 6–10 is not doctrine per se but an acted parable of Jesus's upcoming death but it can still be understood loosely as doctrine since it provides a theological foundation for Jesus's call for imitation. In other words, Jesus's forthcoming death on the cross is what ultimately enables the believers to understand and thus imitate Jesus's footwashing. Such an ethical pattern could also be applied to the Gospel of John as a whole. As discussed in the previous chapters, the first twelve chapters function in a way as doctrine, which becomes a theological or christological basis of what follows in the second half of the Gospel, which focuses on the practical side of discipleship by underscoring the idea of imitation.

30 Roskam, *Path to Virtue*, 30–31.

1.1.3 The Nature and Scope of Imitation

What has become clear so far is that the story of Jesus's footwashing is significant primarily for two reasons: 1) it underscores Jesus's upcoming death as the ultimate source of discipleship; 2) it sets the new moral standard which exceeds the social norm and highlights the new way of moral formation, namely, the imitation of Jesus. Regarding the latter point, readers still have to come to terms with what it actually means to imitate Jesus. Jesus's example is very clear but does Jesus require his disciples to perform the exact act of footwashing for one another or does he want his disciples to extract the moral and theological messages behind the act and embody them creatively in their everyday lives?

Recently Cornelis Bennema has persuasively argued that the Johannine concept of mimesis does not call for the exact replication of the original act but rather "has cognitive and creative dimensions since it concerns an interpretative process of determining the meaning, intent and underlying attitude of the original act and of producing a mimetic act that creatively but faithfully embodies the original meaning, intent and attitude."[31] To support his argument, Bennema applies a four-stage model to the footwashing pericope. First, Jesus's vivid example of footwashing carries the function of *showing* (not telling) the disciples what needs to be imitated. Second, the essence or the significance of Jesus's footwashing should be interpreted by the disciples so that they may understand what lies beneath the original act. For Bennema, 13:12b (γινώσκετε τί πεποίηκα ὑμῖν;) holds the exegetical key to this second stage where understanding is emphatically demanded by Jesus himself. In other words, "what the disciples have seen (sensory perception) needs to be followed by understanding (cognitive perception)."[32] Third, once the disciples understand what Jesus's footwashing signifies, they are to imitate Jesus's action (13:15). Finally, *doing* (imitating Jesus) transforms the disciples' *being* by leading them into a state of blessedness (μακάριος; 13:17). To summarise Bennema's argument, "John 13:4–17 shows a mimetic pattern or process that includes four stages: showing→knowing→doing→being."[33] Then imitating Jesus's example is more than merely replicating the act of footwashing but requires an interpretive process

31 Cornelis Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13: Cloning or Creative Articulation?," *NovT* 56 (2014): 261–274 (274). Burridge similarly argues that what is to be imitated here is not "merely the physical act of washing people's feet." See Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 344. For a position that believes that footwashing was actually practiced within the Johannine community, see Thomas, *Footwashing*; Herold Weiss, "Foot Washing in the Johannine Community," *NovT* 21 (1979): 298–325.

32 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 95.

33 Bennema, *Mimesis*, 97.

by which the disciples decipher the underlying meaning or implications of the original act and thus actualise the true intent of their master's act in their own personal contexts.

Such an evaluation of the Johannine concept of mimesis is in line with that of the contemporary Mediterranean world.[34] In fact, what Plutarch expected from his readers was not "the imitation of the accidental details of the deeds, but of the *essence* of virtue."[35] That is why Plutarch believes that heroes' virtuous deeds are not bound by their historical or cultural situation but one can be virtuous anywhere because it is the essence of virtue that needs to be embodied, not every detail of the deeds. Teresa Morgan also suggests that the concept of imitation in the Greco-Roman world was never meant to be a direct copying of their teacher:[36]

> Imitation is always the second part of an exercise, dependent on what has previously been absorbed and remembered. Unlike the subject of many modern studies, ancient pupils do not imitate what they do not grasp and learn by doing it: absorption comes first, imitation afterwards and grasping some indefinite time later. … Imitation, however, is more than learning to do what is done before you. … Gradually, by repetition, a habit of mind or body is established in the pupil until he is able *to behave and think independently* (italics mine) in the manner of his teacher.

Thus imitation in the Greco-Roman world was much more than a blind copying of a master or of what one reads from biographies, but refers to an ability to behave creatively and independently according to the *essence* of virtue.

Plutarch, however, adds one more aspect to his principle of imitation, that is affectional ties to the exemplar:

> Whenever, therefore, we begin so to love good men, that not only, as Plato puts it, do we regard as blessed the man himself who has self-control, "and blessed, too, anyone of the company which hears the words that come from the lips of such a man," but also, through our admiration and affection for his habit, gait, look, and smile, we are eager to join, as it

34 Josephus, a Jewish writer, also writes about imitating particular figures (both positive and negative) from the past (*Ant.* 6.342; 6.347; 8.24; 8.193; 8.196; 8.251–252; 8.300; 8.315; 9.44; 9.99; 9.173; 9.243, etc.).

35 Hägg, *Biography*, 277.

36 Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 252–253.

> were, and cement ourselves to him, then we must believe that we are truly making progress.
>
> *Virt. prof.* 84E–F

True moral transformation for Plutarch does not happen simply by following the virtuous deeds of some heroes but he goes so far as to suggest that one should try to *love* and *revere* the persons who have exhibited those moral traits. This emotional connection is not only crucial but also "it is from this connection that the followers' commitment to the virtuous life draws its energy."[37] Plutarch throughout this essay clearly argues that a person can only either progress or regress morally, and provides his readers with helpful guidance by spelling out a list of visible behavioural signs[38] one could use to observe one's moral progress. Wright aptly summarises Plutarch's approach to ethical formation; "For Plutarch, the key to completing a successful journey seems to have been the finding of exemplars in the lives of human beings (or even gods). By gradually bringing one's daily habits into alignment with the model(s), one could in fact progress toward virtue."[39]

In this aspect, the purpose of the *Logos* becoming flesh and dwelling among humanity (σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, 1:14) goes beyond the soteriological dimension of the divine presence on earth and offers Jesus as a concrete model for the followers to imitate.[40] Such a view can be substantiated by the fact that only through the incarnation "God's love takes on concrete form, entering into the human world of death and grief, ultimately participating in that death itself. Divine love is not cheap grace, but rather costly love."[41] In other words, incarnation has the function of both saving humanity and showing them the love which must be reproduced in the lives of believers. To further this point, the imitation of Jesus is not then "a means to salvation but the fruit of it"[42] and thus is to be practiced as one makes progress in one's journey of discipleship.

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37 Dryden, *1 Peter*, 168.

38 See William C. Grese, "De Profectibus in Virtute," in *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz; SCHNT 4; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 11–31 (esp. pp. 12–13 for a list of those observable cues).

39 Wright, "Moral Progress," 146.

40 For a comprehensive survey on the ancient practice of imitation, see David B. Capes, "Imitatio Christi and the Gospel Genre," *BBR* 13 (2003): 1–19; Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (AnBib 105; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986).

41 Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading," *John*, 233–244 (243).

42 Tinsley, "Imitation," 47.

These traits of imitation allow us to see more clearly why the call to imitation can appear only at the beginning of the second half of the Gospel. From a literary perspective, the disciples would not be capable of fully understanding and thus imitating Jesus's example early on in Jesus's ministry because their love for and faith in Jesus had not yet been mature enough to take up the call to imitate such a provocative action and more importantly, because the empowering presence of the Spirit had not yet been made available to believers before Jesus's glorification (7:39). Likewise, readers also must come to terms with the identity of Jesus portrayed in the first twelve chapters of the Gospel and develop affectional ties to Jesus before being able to live out the examples shown by Jesus.[43] Then what aspects of Jesus's life does John want his readers to embody? Most scholars have focused solely on love as the object of imitation by taking the love commandment as the ultimate moral example. This can be easily proved by the sheer number of monographs or articles available on the topic of love and a general lack of interest in John's ethics. It is true that the love commandment is the Johannine moral message *par excellence* but readers are also led to imitate other aspects of Jesus's conduct that are often overlooked in Johannine ethical discussions.

1.1.4 The Use of καθὼς as an Identifier of Jesus's Imitable Traits

How are then readers expected to identify these traits of Jesus? Here the passages introduced by καθὼς are especially important in terms of ethical formation since it is through these passages that Jesus teaches some of the essential moral traits that his disciples should embody.[44] The conjunction καθώς has many functions in the New Testament among which an ethical function is most weighty. George Zemek, after reviewing the semantic and syntactic background of καθώς in the New Testament, argues that the moral significance of καθώς is "the bull's-eye of all this discussion."[45] In other words, καθώς is most significantly used in the NT for the purpose of ethical obligation and that is exactly

43 Many scholars see that the key words in the first twelve chapters are 'light' and 'life' which focus on how one can move out of darkness into light, whereas the key word in the second half is 'love' which focuses on how one can manifest such light in real life. Cf. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1973), 135; André. Feuillet, "The Structure of First John: Comparison with the Fourth Gospel. The Pattern of Christian Life," *BTB* 3 (1973): 194–216 (205).

44 Bennema comes up with as many as eight different lingistic expressions that denote mimesis. For our purpose, καθώς adequately captures the major imitable traits that are siginificant for the believer-Jesus mimesis. See Bennema, *Mimesis*, 39–57.

45 George J. Zemek, "Awesome Analogies: Kathōs Constructs in the NT," *JETS* 38 (1995): 337–348 (344).

what we see in John's use of καθώς in the second half of the Gospel. John uses καθώς 31 times in the Gospel, and his use of καθώς to encourage the disciples to emulate Jesus and to show the analogy between Jesus and his disciples occurs exclusively in the Farewell Discourse.

Four major themes arise out of the use of καθώς in the Farewell Discourse: love (13:15, 34; 15:4, 9–10, 12); unity (17:11, 21–22); mission (17:18; 20:21); ἐκ-status (17:14, 16).[46] Especially regarding the last theme, I will argue that the semantic parallel (οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου) between 17:14, 16 and 18:36 has a meaningful connection as to suggest that Jesus's comment in 17:14, 16 foreshadows what he says in front of Pilate in 18:36, and thus Jesus's claim of being not of this world in 17:14, 16 carries both political and ethical connotations. What these four traits signify is that Johannine discipleship is never meant to be a passive, intellectual enterprise but must be accompanied by the tangible signs of progress which must be recognizable both by others and the disciples themselves (13:35; 15:8; cf. 15:5).

These areas of imitation can be considered in light of Plutarch's term αἴσθησις of προκοπή[47] or visible signs of progress. Plutarch along with other ancient philosophers thought that individuals should be able to monitor their moral progress through the observable signs, which would have been different for different philosophical schools.[48] Nonetheless, as seen in Chapter 2, the phenomenon of moral progress was prevalent in the first-century Mediterranean world and the notion of moral progress meant "a gradual abatement of vice and growth towards virtue."[49] It is not too unlikely then that the readers of John's Gospel would have seen these four areas of imitation as the perceptible cues by which believers assess their moral progress. Discipleship in this sense means more than acknowledging who Jesus is but embodying or living out the moral traits modeled by Jesus.

While emphasising the imitation of Jesus, it is also crucial to recognise the ontological distinction between Christ and believers. Though not writing as an exegete, Webster helpfully captures the essence of what it means to imitate

46 Bennema divides Jesus's imitable actions into 'performative mimesis' and 'existential mimesis'. Except for the love command which is explicitly acted out by Jesus's footwaching (performative mimesis), all others (unity, mission, ἐκ-status) belong to existential mimesis where "the believer imitates Jesus in a particular state of existence or being through the use of the verb εἶναι." Bennema, *Mimesis*, 125.

47 Roskam, *Path to Virtue*, 226.

48 Not only are the criteria different but also different philosophers used different terms for the notion of moral progress. John T. Fitzgerald, "The Passions and Moral Progress: An Introduction," in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald; New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–25 (15–16).

49 Roskam, *Path to Virtue*, 253.

Jesus: "Christ's acts are reduplicated through his people who are, as it were, on the same continuum as he. What we may perhaps say is that, because of their gracious participation in God through Christ, Christians are enabled to act in such a way that their acts correspond to the acts of the Saviour."[50] This theological statement on imitation would aptly fit John's Gospel since Jesus's works which are performed (ποιέω) according to the Father's will (5:19) are also to be performed (ποιέω) and carried out by his disciples (14:12). Even in this reciprocal relationship, one must not dismiss the fact that the imitation of Jesus is possible not because the believers are elevated to the realm of the Divine *Logos* but because Jesus has voluntarily lowered himself to the realm of flesh[51] by washing the feet of his inferior and still-confused disciples and also by offering a new status to his disciples as his friends (15:15).[52] The fact that disciples are called 'little children' in 13:33 also signifies that the intimate relationship, which was exclusively enjoyed between Jesus and the Father, is now extended to the believers.[53] Though Jesus is still called "ὁ διδάσκαλος, καί ὁ κύριος" (13:13), Jesus is no longer portrayed as a lofty figure as in the first twelve chapters but as a friend who holds nothing back including his life.[54] Having this new, intimate relationship established, only then does Jesus begin to tell his disciples plainly what it means to and how to live as his followers.[55]

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50 John B. Webster, "Christology, Imitability and Ethics," *SJT* 39 (1986): 309–326 (323).

51 Jason Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 62–65.

52 The notion of friendship can only be properly appreciated when one realises that the friendship Jesus offers to his disciples is patterned after the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Culy suggests the three areas Jesus invites his believes to enjoy: unity, mutuality, and even some semblance of 'equality'. Culy, *Friendship*, 149–157.

53 T. Evan Pollard, "The Father-Son and God-Believer Relationship according to St. John: A Brief Study of John's Use of Prepositions," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977), 363–369. Enjoying such intimacy does not mean that the believers have the same perfect equality with Jesus as he does with the Father. Yet "the actions and words of Jesus serve as an effective bridge over the chasm of inequality that ontologically characterizes his relationship with his followers." Culy, *Friendship*, 157. Cf. Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 104.

54 One of the primary characteristics of a true friend in the ancient Mediterranean world is the level of intimacy that enables friends to speak to each other honestly without holding anything back. Jesus seems to actualise or even goes beyond this intimacy in the second half of the Gospel by washing his disciples' feet. Such a radical picture would help redefine the concept of friendship not only for Christians but also for non-Christian contemporary people. See A.C. Mitchell, "'Greet the Friends by Name': New Testament Evidence for the Greco-Roman Topos on Friendship," in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald; SBLRBS 34; Atlanta: Scholars Press), 225–262.

55 On the contrary, in the first twelve chapters, Jesus focuses exclusively on what it means to and how one can believe in him. Only those who have grasped such truth can move

Though there is much emphasis on divine mimesis (the Son-Father mimesis), which also becomes a paradigm for the believer-Jesus mimesis,[56] the focus of this chapter will be, however, on the latter mimesis since the main objective of this work is to trace how believers advance in their journey of discipleship (moral progress) by imitating Jesus. Due to the focused nature of this chapter, we will take a thematic approach, which will first focus on how a particular trait is portrayed in the first twelve chapters and then in the Farewell Discourse in order to examine how each trait exemplified by Jesus shapes the moral perspective and thus behaviour of readers. As seen in the footwashing story, the first and primary sign a true disciple should exhibit is love, to which we now turn.

2 Imitable Traits of Jesus

2.1 *Love*

The first imitable trait that Jesus wants his disciples to embody is that of love and this is clearly presented in the following passages.

> 13:34 Εντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, ***καθὼς*** ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.
>
> 15:12 Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμή, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους ***καθὼς*** ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς.

The theme of love has been studied extensively in Johannine scholarship[57] and it is impossible to interact with all the available scholarly works on this topic. As will be seen later, love in the Gospel of John is not an abstract idea that needs to be scrutinised as a philosophical concept but is rather presented as a way of living that needs to be embodied and imitated by real people. In other words, John does not simply tell what love is but rather *shows* what love is by triggering readers' imagination and creativity through the sequence of vari-

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on to the more intimate teachings in which Jesus "treats the disciples as equals by speaking plainly to them." Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Int* 58 (2004): 146–157 (155).

56 These terms are taken from Bennema, *Mimesis*. For an extentensive study on divine memesis, see Bennema, *Mimesis*, 65–81.

57 For a helpful survey of the works on the topic of love in John's Gospel up to the year 2007, see Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (AnBib 177; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2007), 15–28. For the latest treatment on Johannine love, see Weyer-Menkhoff, *Ethik*, 227–249.

ous narrative events. As expected from the previous paragraph, the love[58] that readers are supposed to imitate is based on and originated from the love the Father shares with Jesus (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23–24, 26). The difficulty with this model is that humans are not able fully to imitate the divine relationship, which is beyond the realm of human comprehension. Despite such inherent difficulties, the *Word* taking on flesh[59] (1:14) has made it possible for believers to know indirectly the dynamics that lie behind the Father-Son relationship, and Jesus's earthly presence including his interaction with various characters in the Gospel reflects the essence of such a love that needs to be grasped and lived out not only within the group of believers but also within the world.[60] The love command appears twice in the Farewell Discourse and it is important to pay attention to the immediate context in which these love commands appear. Before tackling these two passages, it is equally important to examine, though briefly, how the language of 'love' is used in the first twelve chapters.

2.1.1 Love in the Book of Signs

The scope of this investigation will be limited to those passages that have Jesus or God (the Father)[61] as the subject of ἀγαπάω since it is the loving actions of Jesus and the Father that the disciples are to imitate. What follows is a brief narrative analysis of relevant passages in search for the central characteristics of love that Jesus came to reveal to his followers.

A. The first example is found in 3:16[62] where God is said to love the world. This passage appears in the context of Jesus's forthcoming death (ὑψωθῆναι, 3:14) on the cross and its saving effect on those who believe (3:15, 17–18). God's love here does not simply refer to a strong feeling of affection

58 For a brief summary on the various love relationships in John's Gospel, see Jörg Frey, "Love-Relations in the Fourth Gospel: Establishing a Semantic Network," *Repetition*, 171–198 (177–178).

59 Thompson rightly notes that σάρξ in the Gospel refers not only to the human and natural sphere but also the material and bodily sphere. The focus on the latter must indicate that 'the *Word* became flesh' means more than revelation occurring in the earthly sphere but "through and in the 'flesh' of Jesus." Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Incarnate Word: Perspectives on Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson 1988), 50.

60 The issue of whether a Johannine Jesus has any loving concern for the world will be discussed in the next section.

61 Since Jesus only does what he sees his Father doing (5:19), God (the Father) must be included in the discussion.

62 Some scholars think that this particular love relationship between God and the world is uncharacteristic of John's thought. For a fuller discussion, see Fernando F. Segovia, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition* (SBLDS 58; ed. 1982; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1982), 165–170.

towards humanity but is accompanied by the concrete sacrificial act that gives life to those who would otherwise perish. Thus God's love is made visible to human beings through the Son's obedience to the mission given by God.[63]

B. The second example comes from 3:35, in which the Father's love for the Son[64] is expressed by giving all things (πάντα) to the Son. Though it is not clear what Jesus means by 'all things', Morris understands the phrase as referring to "the gift of life in the Spirit."[65] Such an interpretation is reasonable since v. 34 reveals that the Father gives the Spirit to the Son without measure, which in 3:35 is conveyed as 'all things', and v. 36 connects the giving of 'all things' to the promise of salvation to those who believe in the Son. In other words, the loving relationship between the Father and the Son moves in the outward direction for the benefit of those who believe in the Son.

C. The third example appears in 10:17 where Jesus is likened to a good shepherd. The reason for the Father's love for the Son is conditional upon[66] (ὅτι) the Son's willingness to lay down his life for the sheep. The Son is not, however, only obedient to the Father's will by dying on the cross but also has the authority to take up (cf. 2:19; 6:62) the life he lays down for his sheep. Like the first two examples, the love between the Father and the Son is never confined to themselves but always has the welfare of others in mind.

D. Lastly, in 11:5 Jesus is said to love Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Though the delay in Jesus's arrival may seem to be the cause of Lazarus' death (11:21), the context makes it very likely that Lazarus was already dead beyond the possibility of resuscitation even if Jesus had hurried to the scene (11:17, 39). Thus it is wrong to assume that Jesus delayed his visit simply to cause unnecessary bereavement or to make his miracle more stunning. On the contrary, Jesus is determined to go to Bethany even though there is a tangible danger awaiting for him in the land of Judea. Here we see that Jesus is

63 On the physical level, Jesus embodies God's love for the world by feeding the hungry (6:5–16), healing the sick (4:46–54; 5:2–9; 9:1–7), and giving money to the needy (13:29).

64 The similar expression is found in 5:20 where the Father loves (φιλέω) the Son by showing all that he himself is doing. Even in this case, the ultimate end for showing everything to the Son is to bring people to faith.

65 Morris, *John*, 219.

66 This is not to say that the Father loves the Son "because crucifixion took place … [rather the Father's love for the Son] is eternally linked with and mutually dependent upon the Son's complete alignment with the Father's will and his obedience even unto death." Barrett, *John*, 377.

> not deterred by anything, even by the threat of death in doing the Father's will (11:9–10). In fact, the focus of this episode should be on Jesus's love for Lazarus since Jesus placed "his own life in jeopardy by re-entering Judaea."[67] Hence Jesus's love brought Lazarus back to life but has brought himself nearer to his own death (11:53).

There are two essential points we can draw from this brief analysis of 'love' in the first twelve chapters. First, the love relation between the Father and the Son is primarily sustained by the unconditional obedience of the Son to the Father. The Son is never mindful of his own self-interest but is only mindful of the glory of God (11:4; *contra* 5:44; 7:18). Second, the love shared and shown by the Father and the Son is never inner-oriented but is always outward-looking for the benefit of those who believe in the Son. In that aspect, the divine love is in stark contrast to that of humans that only seek glory for themselves (12:43).

2.1.2 ἐντολή: Voluntary or Compulsory Love?

Before shifting attention to the two love commands, an interesting observation may be noted in terms of John's use of the word ἐντολή, which is used 4 times in the first twelve chapters: three times in reference to the Father giving the commandment to the Son (10:18; 12:49, 50) and once to the order given by the chief priests and the Pharisees (11:57). Only in the Farewell Discourse do we see the use of ἐντολή in reference to Jesus giving the commandment to his disciples.

The use of ἐντολή in the *Book of the Signs* is primarily tied to the context of Jesus's voluntary death (10:18) and Jesus's voluntary self-restraint in terms of speaking and doing (12:49–50). What these passages reveal is that ἐντολή in John's Gospel does not refer to a unilateral commandment forcefully given to Jesus by the Father but "indicate the will of the Father directing the Son to the work of salvation and indicating to him the means by which the salvation of men should be accomplished."[68] Thus the term 'commandment' in this Gospel has nothing to do with an enforced order on a unwilling recipient but rather stresses the voluntary attitude of the one who is being commanded (10:17–18), and readers are encouraged to see in those passages the perfect harmony between the Father's will and the Son's obedience. In fact, Jesus's obedience is praised and further becomes the model of imitation not for the fact that Jesus somehow accepts the charge from the Father but rather for the fact that his obe-

67 Wendy Sproston North, *The Lazarus Story within the Johannine Tradition* (JSNTSup 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 50.

68 Raymond F. Collins, "'A New Commandment I Give To You, that You Love One Another …' (Jn 13:34)," *LTP* 35 (1979): 235–261 (246).

dience proceeds from his profound love for the Father. In that sense, ἐντολή[69] seems to carry not so much "imperative force"[70] as a natural consequence of mutual trust and love between the Father and the Son. Such fundamental attitudes of trust and love are also expected to be shared by both the disciples and readers whose love for one another must proceed from and be inspired by Jesus's love for them. With such an understanding of ἐντολή in mind, readers are introduced to the first love commandment.

2.1.3 The Love Command I

The location of the first love command (13:34–35) seems somewhat out of place since it gets in the way of the narrative flow as John tries to develop the theme of Jesus's imminent return to the Father.[71] Such an awkward positioning of the first love command can be easily noted especially in light of the second commandment (15:12), which, as we will see, fits well within the immediate context. Though the first love command is separated from the footwashing episode by the story of Judas' betrayal (13:21–30), it is very likely that readers would read the first love command in light of the footwashing story not only because they are physically close to each other but more importantly because 13:1 already highlights Jesus's love for his loved ones (εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς), which becomes the foundation for the first love commandment.

The intimate setting conveyed by Jesus's footwashing should still be felt by readers, and those who have not yet affirmed their faith in Jesus may find themselves alienated in the following narratives.[72] Such intimacy reaches its peak as Jesus calls his disciples "τεκνία"[73] in 13:33, which is Jesus's most vivid expression of affection towards the disciples. The timing of Jesus's calling of his disciples 'τεκνία' is significant as Judas has left the room into the darkness at this point. It is not so much that Judas is prohibited from listening to Jesus's farewell speech but it may be that Jesus wants to maximise the sense of solidarity within the remaining disciples since what he will be sharing in the next hours will be

69 O'Connell argues that a Johannine understanding of ἐντολή could be enhanced through a semantic analysis of the term in the Old Testament, see Matthew J. O'Connell, "The Concept of Commandment in the Old Testament," *TS* 21 (1960): 351–403.

70 Collins, "Commandment," 246.

71 Segovia, *Love Relationships*, 122.

72 The bathing (λούω) in 13:10 seems to signify that the disciples have reached an appropriate level of belief, though not perfect, in Jesus and similarly readers are expected to do the same if they are to fully appreciate and to follow Jesus's example. Cf. Segovia, "Footwashing," 31–51 (44).

73 Apart from John's Gospel, it appears seven times in the NT only in 1John (2:1; 2:12; 2:28; 3:7; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21).

extremely crucial for their spiritual wellbeing especially in light of Jesus's coming absence.[74] Furthermore, it is not just the disciples' spiritual condition that is at stake but their actual persecution is foreshadowed (13:38; 15:18–20; 16:33). For that reason Jesus needs the core disciples to remain faithful in confronting trials and to be role models for other believers by keeping Jesus's commandments (14:15, 21, 23–24) and by laying down their life for Jesus (13:38). Such love for Jesus is neither mystical nor only spiritual since their love has to be concretely manifested so that all people would know that they are Jesus's disciples (13:35). As seen previously, John makes a distinction between knowing and doing what is good, and treats the latter as the higher form of response to Jesus's example (13:17). The confessional aspect of discipleship has been the focus in the first twelve chapters and is now developed into a more concrete, practical aspect of discipleship that focuses on the actual doing of Jesus's teachings.

Then how does Jesus's example of footwashing help readers understand the love command in 13:34? Jesus's footwashing in relation to his imminent death highlights the fact that the love exemplified by Jesus challenges the disciples to go beyond what the world expects in terms of moral deeds. The sacrificial aspect of Jesus's love seems to indicate that true love is almost always accompanied by some form of loss to those who love. For instance, Jesus's compassion[75] for the people often leads Jesus himself to conflicts, which not only put him in danger but also accelerate Jesus's hour for death. In ch. 5 the act of Jesus's healing of an invalid at the Sheep Gate causes the Jews to seek all the more to kill Jesus, and in the following chapter, Jesus's feeding of the five thousand also leads many of the disciples to desert Jesus (6:66) and the Jews to look for an opportunity to kill Jesus (7:1). In fact, except in the healing of the official's son (4:46–64), Jesus is the one who approaches and offers the healing to the lame (5:1–6) and the blind (9:1–41).[76] In these cases, Jesus actively pursues and provides those in need the help that no one else is able to give.

The intensity of Jesus's love for his people also deepens as the hour for his death draws nearer. In John 10 Jesus makes it plain that his love for his own flock[77] extends to the point of voluntarily laying down his life for them (cf. 15:13;

74 Of course, the Father will send the παράκλητος (14:16) to replace Jesus's earthly ministry but our discussion should be limited to the ethical enquiry.

75 Though Jesus's healings in John's Gospel are rather focused on the glorious reality of God, God's love for the world (3:16) mandates Jesus to act in the same compassionate way (5:19).

76 Nijay Gupta, "A Man of No Reputation: Jesus and Ascribed Honor in the Gospel of John," *ATJ* 40 (2008): 43–59 (52–53).

77 Brown links this passage with 11:45–53 and argues that the scope of Jesus's death signifies "the universality of salvation." Brown, *John*, 1:442–443. For a helpful discussion on the relationship between the 'door' and the 'good shepherd', see Paul W. Meyer, "A Note on John 10:1–18," *JBL* 75 (1956): 232–235.

contra 13:37) and such a voluntary death is often considered as noble death in the ancient Mediterranean world.[78] Jesus's love is depicted more vividly in the Lazarus episode where Jesus's affection for him is more explicitly described (11:3, 5, 11, 36). In this pericope readers encounter "the most complex cluster of Jesus's emotions" found nowhere else in the Gospel and such emotions[79] may indicate Jesus's willingness to die for his friend since, as previously noted, "Jesus calls [Lazarus] to life while Jesus himself goes to death, and because of that greatest sign of his life-giving power, Jesus is, then, sentenced to die."[80] Finally, in 12:23–26 Jesus shows a similar picture of sacrificial love through the imagery of a dying seed that produces a large crop. Here Jesus explicitly makes *death* "the necessary condition for the generation of life"[81]

Though John does not highlight these recipients of Jesus's compassion as "objects of Jesus's mercy"[82] like the Synoptics, the Johannine Jesus nonetheless is not impassive to those who are in need both spiritually and physically. Those who deny such truth about the Johannine Jesus fail to see that John's Gospel presents these stories "from the perspective of how they respond to Jesus in faith,"[83] and Jesus's concern for one's spiritual condition is his way of showing the highest form of compassion. In other words, one should not too easily conclude that the Johannine Jesus is not as compassionate as the Jesus portrayed in the Synoptics just because the Johannine Jesus is never explicitly said to have

78 For a careful analysis of this particular pericope in light of Greek rhetorical literature, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "The "Noble" Shepherd in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background," *Perspective*, 282–312. Based on Aristotle's discussion on what constitutues a noble life, Neyrey presents seven criteria by which we can discern whether Jesus's death was a noble one: "(1) it benefits others, and is not done for self-interest; (2) it is just and demonstrates justice; (3) it produces honor and glory, or advances one's reputation especially after death, and causes one to be remembered; (4) it was done voluntarily, by choice; (5) it ended in victory; the actor was not defeated; (6) it is unique to this particular person or distinctive of a special class of persons; (7) it yielded posthumous honors." Neyrey argues that Jesus's death meets all of these criteria satisfactorily and thus "demonstrate the nobleness of Jesus precisely by his death." Neyrey, "Shepherd," 295, 307.

79 For a comprehensive survey on Jesus's emotions in John's Gospel, see Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus's Emotions in the Fourth Gospel* (LNTS 284; London: T&T Clark, 2005). Moloney argues that Jesus's emotions such as anger (11:33, 38) and tears (11:35) are not due to Lazarus' death but rather due to "the universal lack of faith." Francis J. Moloney, "Can Everyone be Wrong? A Reading of John 11.1–12.8," *NTS* 49 (2003): 505–527 (518).

80 Frey, "Love Relations," 190.

81 Carson, *John*, 438.

82 Robert J. Karris, *Jesus and the Marginalized in John's Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 53.

83 Karris, *Marginalized*, 53.

compassion[84] for the crowd. It might rather be that John uses different language to describe the Johannine Jesus doing the same kind of loving actions as found in the Synoptics. As seen above, John slowly and sometimes implicitly builds up the theme of love in the first twelve chapters, which becomes more explicit in the episode of Jesus's footwashing and ultimately culminates in the death of Jesus for his loved ones, both present and future.

The first love command in light of the footwashing pericope then highlights the *nature* of love that Jesus wants his disciples to embody—the love that surpasses social norms and overcomes even the fear of death. This love commandment is new[85] (καινός), not in a sense that the disciples never heard of such a command (cf. Lev 19:18) but in a sense that it now has a christological-eschatological foundation and it is bound up with "the new order it both mandates and exemplifies."[86] It carries christological significance since Jesus himself has shown the concrete example for his disciples to follow and also carries eschatological significance since "the one who delivers the commandment is about to be sacrificed in order to establish the new, eschatological covenant, a covenant by which God orders his relationship to men in a new and final way."[87] Though the word 'covenant' is nowhere found in the Gospel, not a few scholars[88] have suggested that the new covenant is a controlling motif behind the new love command. Whether the theme of the new covenant can be traced or even sustained in this farewell context or not, readers at least begin to see that discipleship now takes a whole new turn that Jesus no longer simply demands his followers to believe in him but to imitate him by embodying the sacrificial nature of love.

2.1.4 The Love Command II

The second love command (15:12) appears within the pericope of the vine imagery which is not only important for the immediate context but "becomes the apex of [John 13–17], proclaiming the dominant theme that spiritual unity

84 The verb σπλαγχνίζομαι (meaning 'have pity' or 'feel sympathy') is used 5 times in Matt (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34), 4 times in Mark (1:41; 6:34; 8:2), and 3 times in Luke (7:13; 10:33; 15:20).

85 Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament* (3 vols.; St. Louis: Herder, 1966), 3:53–54.

86 Carson, *John*, 484.

87 R.A. Harrisville, "The Concept of Newness in the New Testament," *JBL* 74 (1955): 69–79 (79).

88 Brown, *John*, 2:614; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 247; Lindars, *John*, 463; Chennattu, *Discipleship*, 96–98; John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People: The Narrative & Themes of the Fourth Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 163; Collins, "Commandment," 235–261 (249–252); Charles H. Talbert, "The Fourth Gospel's Soteriology between New Birth and Resurrection," *PRSt* 37 (2010): 133–145, and many others.

with Jesus is at the center of the discourse."[89] At first, the second love command in 15:12 seems to simply reiterate the first love command in 13:34. In light of the vine imagery, however, this second love command not only complements but also enlightens readers in terms of the *mode* by which they can fulfill that love command. The verb μένω functions as a central Johannine theological term and is used throughout the Gospel. Though μένω primarily conveys a symbolic meaning in the vine metaphor, it is also used "in colloquial sense of 'stay' or 'remain'."[90] Whether the word is used literally or theologically, 'abiding' almost always carries the spatial meaning, which further highlights the relational aspect. Before investigating the vine passage in detail, it would be helpful to see how the concept of 'abiding' is used and developed in the first twelve chapters.

The verb μένω[91] is used for the first time in 1:32 where the Spirit comes upon Jesus and remains (ἔμεινεν) on him. Here abiding is used to portray the unique Father-Son relationship where the Father endows Jesus with the Spirit "as an empowerment for his salvific ministry."[92] 'Abiding' is not only reserved, however, for the divine relationship but begins to take on a more ordinary nuance in the later parts of the Gospel that describes the relationship between Jesus and believers. For example, Jesus gathers his first disciples by inviting them to 'come and see' (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε) and they respond to Jesus by remaining (μένει) with Jesus that day (1:39).

At the literary level, the story seems to tell readers where the disciples were in terms of their physical proximity to Jesus but as the narrative develops, readers begin to see that abiding actually signifies the beginning of a new relationship with Jesus that ultimately allows the indwelling presence of the Father and the Spirit within the believers through the Son.[93] In fact, there are numerous passages where μένω is used to highlight Jesus's presence with his followers or the followers seeking Jesus's presence (1:33, 39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:54; 14:25). In these cases, 'abiding' also signifies more than spatial meaning but

89 Wayne Brouwer, *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiastic Reading* (SBLDS 182; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 10.

90 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 89.

91 Though the verb μένω is not used, readers can easily recognise the concept of 'abiding' at the very beginning of the Gospel where the Word is said to be with (πρὸς) God (1:2) and the Son at the Father's bosom (εἰς τὸν κόλπον, 1:18). The fact that John emphasises "the idea of Son's intimacy with the Father and the Word's presence with God" early on in the prologue clearly shows that the notion of 'abiding' will be crucial in understanding the rest of the Gospel. Andrew Brower Latz, "A Short Note Toward a Theology of Abiding in John's Gospel," *JTI* 4.2 (2010): 161–168 (163).

92 Bennema, *Saving Wisdom*, 125.

93 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 93–94.

it rather conveys soteriological significance since 'continuing' to abide with Jesus ultimately leads to a life-giving relationship.[94] Furthermore the use of μένω in 6:56, where eating and drinking of Jesus's flesh and blood are described "as a mutual remaining in one another,"[95] presents the most vivid language of intimacy between Jesus and believers in the entire New Testament.[96] Abiding in that sense is the Johannine way of discerning genuine discipleship from the counterfeit one (6:66, cf. 16:1) since "perseverance is an essential part of abiding."[97]

Having seen the relationship between 'abiding' and discipleship in the first twelve chapters, readers are drawn to the most dramatic depiction of 'abiding' in the vine metaphor. In this particular pericope, the notion of 'abiding' is taken to a higher level of relationship that should ultimately lead to fruit-bearing. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine (15:4), the disciples neither bear fruit nor have life without abiding in Jesus (15:6, 8). It is critical to recognise that abiding in the Johannine sense involves the human responsibility which must play a role in abiding in Christ (15:4–7), abiding in his love (15:9), and keeping his commandments (15:10; cf. 14:15, 21, 23–24).[98] The emphasis on human responsibility is closely tied with divine judgment, which is described as already 'complete and decisive' (the use of the aorist form of βάλλω, 15:6) for those who refuse to abide in the vine.[99] This vine imagery then highlights Jesus as the source from which the disciples gain necessary spiritual nutrition to bear fruit, and such an intimate relationship with Jesus is supposed to prove itself by keeping the commandments of Jesus, which are later summarised in the singular commandment of love (15:12). Put differently, the fruit that Jesus requires of his disciples is to love one another, and one cannot possibly keep that love command unless one abides in Jesus: "the new commandment has

94 'Following' (ἀκολουθέω) is another verb that carries a similar theological significance which "describes the actions of disciples in relation to Jesus … be where Jesus is and experience what he experiences." van der Watt, "Repetition," 87–108 (101, n. 34). Cf. van der Merwe, "Imitatio," 133.

95 Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 243.

96 Robert A. Peterson, "Union with Christ in the Gospel of John," *Presb* XXXIX (2013): 9–29 (9–16).

97 Latz, "Abiding," 163; Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 195; Raymond F. Collins, *These Things Have been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 53.

98 Christopher David Bass, "A Johannine Perspective of the Human Responsibility to Persevere in the Faith Through the Use of μενω and Other Related Motifs," *WTJ* 69 (2007): 305–325 (324).

99 Carson, *John*, 519.

Jesus as its source and norm."[100] The vine imagery further symbolises the community of friends, which is founded upon "the highest ideals of friendship"[101] as seen previously (15:13–14). What readers begin to see at this point of narrative is "a link between Jesus's mission to make God known through his loving self-gift and the task of the disciples to continue that mission in their obedience to his commandment that they love one another as he has loved them (13:34; 15:12, 17)."[102]

The *mode* of love displayed by the vine metaphor then becomes clear; the disciples are expected to love one another not with the love obtained inwardly but with the love drawn from Jesus who not only provides but also embodies true love. Carson insightfully sums up the dynamics behind the Johannine mode of love as follows: "… genuine love for God ensures genuine love for his Son, who is the focal point of divine revelation; that genuine love for the Son ensures obedience to him (14:15); that obedience to him is especially tested by obedience to the new commandment, the command to love (13:34–35; 15:12). By an unbreakable chain, love for God is tied to and verified by love for other believers (cf. 1Jn. 4:11–21)."[103]

2.1.5 The Scope of Love

Having examined the *nature* and *mode* of love, no one denies that there is a heavy emphasis on love in John's Gospel but not everyone agrees on the scope of love. As seen before, John's Gospel has been described by some[104] as a book that is concerned only about the well-being of the insiders while remaining impassive to those outside the community. Does the Johannine Jesus teach his followers to love only those who share the same vision and belief? One of the reasons that makes John's Gospel appear to some to be less ethical than the Synoptics is the lack of an explicit command to love one's neighbour, and for that reason many critics argue that John's Gospel is particularistic not only in its soteriology but also in its ethics. Such an unfavourable view of Johannine love is further aggravated by scholars like Lattke,[105] who largely disregards the ethical dimension of love. He argues that love in John's Gospel basically refers to unity in the Word, which is reflected in a reciprocal subject-object relationship

100 Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 270.

101 Koester, *Symbolism*, 274.

102 Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 120.

103 Carson, *John*, 521.

104 Sanders, *Ethics*, 100.

105 Michael Lattke, *Einheit im Wort: Die spezifische Bedeutung von ἀγάπη, ἀγαπᾶν und φιλεῖν im Johannesevangelium* (SANT 41; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1975).

between the Father, the Son, and those who belong to Jesus.[106] His understanding of the Johannine dualism as "the irreconcilable opposition between God and the World"[107] limits the scope of the Johannine love only to those who remain united in Jesus's word and has reduced the meaning of love to a gnostic-metaphysical sense.

The most controversial passage in the Gospel regarding love for outsiders is found in 3:16 where God is said to love the world (κόσμος). Does the κόσμος in 3:16 refer to the whole of humanity or only the chosen ones? In order to see the semantic range of this particular word, it is important to see how John uses this noun in the pericope in which 3:16 appears. In the beginning of John 3, Nicodemus is introduced as a Pharisee and a leader of the Jews who keeps misunderstanding Jesus until the end of the narrative. If John's Gospel were really particularistic both in its soteriology and ethics as some would argue, John would have continued the story by highlighting the Jewishness of Nicodemus and thus by linking darkness primarily to the Jews.[108] John expands the phenomenon of loving darkness, however, to the entire world by emphasising that it is not Ἰουδαιοι but ἄνθρωποι who loved the darkness rather than the light (3:19). In other words, the Nicodemus narrative focuses not on the failure of the Jews but on the universality of sin. Similarly, when God is said to love the world, it is not a chosen subgroup of humanity that John has in mind but the whole of humanity.[109]

Such a focus of universality is enhanced by the fact that Jesus is later described as the Saviour (4:42) and the light (8:12) of the world (κόσμος). It is true that the opposition between Jesus and the world (the Jews) is getting ever more intense as the narrative unfolds, and some would argue that such a gloomy outlook confirms that the impenetrable boundary exists between Jesus and the world. Volf persuasively argues, however, that the opposite is true.[110]

> An increase in tension is exactly what we should expect, especially if redemption is to happen through the death of the Lamb. The apparent obliteration of good by evil is the way in which evil is overcome by the enactment of divine goodness. The very opposite of dualism is at work here. God, who is love, loves the estranged world to the point of assuming

106 Lattke, *Einheit*, 20, 22.

107 Translation taken from Varghese, *Imagery of Love*, 23.

108 The Jews are often portrayed positively in the Gospel of John (4:9, 22; 11:45; 12:11; 18:33, 39; 19:3, 19, 21).

109 For a comprehensive survey on the semantic meaning and context of "the Jews" and "the world," see Kierspel, *Jews and World*.

110 Miroslav Volf, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism," *John*, 19–50 (24).

> flesh in order to suffer death at the hands of the world. In this way God not only opens the road for the world's return but attracts it back. God loves first and enacts this love on the cross so that human beings may love God and God's creatures in return (cf. 1John 3:8–10).

Some would still want to argue that God's universal offer of salvation does not necessarily obligate the disciples to love all,[111] but the fact that the disciples are sent into the world by Jesus who willingly gives his life for the world (1:29; 6:51), and that Jesus is sent into the world by the Father whose love for the world is clearly expressed (3:16) show some textual evidence against such a conjecture—this point will be made clearer in the section on mission.

What this general observation signifies is then that it is hermeneutically unconvincing to minimise the ethical value of John's Gospel just because it does not contain an explicit command to love one's neighbour. Some scholars have deduced such a conclusion based on the hypothetical similarity between the writings of Qumran and the Gospel. It is clear that the Qumran writings explicitly encourage the members of the community to hate the children of darkness (1QS 1.10) but does John's Gospel follow suit in that regard? Such a water-tight dualism as found in the Qumran writings is not found in the Gospel—according to Fensham, "nowhere in the Johannine writings this brotherly love is contrasted with hatred to the enemies."[112] In fact, Jesus forbids his disciples from doing any harm to their enemies. The most concrete example appears in ch. 18 where Peter cuts off the right ear of one of the high priest's servants as they come to arrest Jesus. Here Jesus's reaction to Peter's impetuous action is firm—no physical violence[113] should ever be used in doing the will of God (18:11). Jesus's response is in stark contrast with that of the Jews who have constantly threatened to kill Jesus (5:18; 7:1; 7:19; 7:25; 8:37; 8:40) and to excom-

111 Robert H. Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 60.

112 F.C. Fensham, "Love in the writings of Qumran and John," *Neot* 6 (1972): 67–77 (75).

113 Some would see Jesus's cleansing of the temple as a form of physical violence directed to the Jews onsite but nowhere in the narrative confirms that Jesus physically hurts anyone there. It should rather be understood as an act of "prophetic symbolism," which exposes the wrong use of the temple by the Jews and also announces the new order in which the Jews must acknowledge the coming of the Messiah. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 334; Jan G. van der Watt and Jacobus Kok, "Violence in a Gospel of Love," in *Coping with Violence in the New Testament* (eds. Pieter G.R. de Viliers and Jan Willem van Henten; STAR 16; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 151–183 (168, n. 61); Adele Reinhartz, "Love, Hate, and Violence in the Gospel of John," in *Violence in the New Testament* (eds. Shelly Matthews and Leigh Gibson; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 109–123 (112).

municate those who believe in Jesus (9:22). Readers are already familiar with the threats and vilification[114] released against Jesus from the Jews, and such hostility reaches its penultimate expression at this very moment of the arrest. If Jesus ever intends to or endorses others to use violence, this would be the most appropriate time to do so since this arrest finally leads to his own death. Jesus's response, however, shows that Jesus not only refrains from using violence himself but also rebukes even the one (Peter) who seems to use violence justifiably for rescuing his own master from a false accusation.

Another example may be found in the episode of Jesus washing the feet of and giving the morsel to Judas who is portrayed as a devil (6:70) and a thief (12:6; cf. 10:1; 10:10). Whether these acts of Jesus in ch. 13 carry any sacramental significance is beyond the scope of this section but there is no question that both footwashing and the breaking of bread are Jesus's final personal expression of his love for his own disciples and Jesus's final opportunity to prepare his disciples for the coming trials and mission. What is surprising, however, is that Jesus lets Judas partake in this highly significant event despite knowing who Judas is (6:71; 13:26). Moloney describes Judas as a person of "ignorance, betrayal and denial,"[115] but Jesus does not hesitate to show his love even to Judas.[116] The fact that the disciples are uncertain of whom Jesus speaks when he says "one of you will betray me (13:21)" shows that Jesus has not been showing any sign of reproach or disapproval towards Judas all along. Some would argue that Judas should not be blamed since his betrayal is motivated by the devil himself (13:2; 13:27). Such reasoning must be rejected since Judas consciously "has chosen for Satan rather than for Jesus."[117] Judas is responsible for his betrayal because knowing the light all too well, he still embraces the darkness where his evil intentions cannot be easily uncovered. Then as Carson puts it, "this episode attests the loving character of Jesus"[118] and also as Moloney puts it, "it is in Jesus's never-failing love for such disciples, a love which even reached out to the archetype of the evil disciple … calls for the reader's response to this God through a commitment to a similar quality of love (vv. 15–17, 34–

114 It is true that Jesus uses vilification against the Jews (e.g. 8:44, 55), but the purpose of Jesus's vilification was not to shame opponents but to bring them to eternal life. In other words, Jesus's vilification should be understood within the context of "God's mission that was motivated by love." See van der Watt and Kok, "Violence," 182.

115 Francis J. Moloney, "A Sacramental Reading of John 13:1–38," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 237–256 (246).

116 Argued similarly by G. Charles A. Fernando, *The Relationship Between Law and Love in the Gospel of John* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 167.

117 Brown, *John*, 2:578.

118 Carson, *John*, 461.

35)."[119] Thus Jesus shows no favouritism even to the one who will betray him and also does not withhold his love even from the one who is most undeserving.

Lastly, the Johannine notion of love broadens its scope in light of Jesus's mission, and Furnish's comment is especially helpful in this respect: "The Fourth Evangelist regards God's love and the Son's mission of love to be extended to all who will receive it (him), then we must also acknowledge that the commandment to "love one another" need not be regarded in itself as excluding love for neighbors and enemies … the expression "one another" has an eschatological reference, not a narrow ecclesiastical one."[120] As will be seen more fully later, God's saving mission to the world forbids a strict dualism that restricts an individual from moving from darkness to light or from being the devil's children (8:44) to being the children of God (1:12).[121] The message of eternal life is then not to be kept in the sealed box only for the privileged ones but is to be actively shared by all who would listen and believe in Jesus. If the emphasis on mission in John's Gospel signifies God's love for the world, it is not reasonable to ascribe "love of the world to the Father but denying it to the Son and the believers"[122] since one of the core virtues that binds the Son and the believers to the Father is obedience. Therefore, if God's love goes beyond the immediate circle of believers, the love of believers should also manifest the same kind of depth and scope as that of the Father.

2.1.6 Conclusion

The investigation of the Johannine love commands turns out to be much more than a literal copying of Jesus's footwashing but it offers a comprehensive picture of love that is no less wide-ranging and inclusive compared to love in other NT writings. Due to the organic nature of the narrative, the love command must be analysed first within the whole Gospel and then the immediate context. Our analysis shows that the first and second love commands are not redundant to each other but the immediate context reveals that they serve different functions; the first command shows the *nature* and the second command shows the *mode* of Jesus's love. The wider context also reveals that Johannine love is in fact far broader in its scope than it might at first seem.

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119 Moloney, "Sacramental," 237–256 (254).

120 Furnish, *Love Command*, 148.

121 See Enno Edzard Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften: Studien zur Semantik der Liebe und zum Motivkreis des Dualismus* (WUNT II/197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 22–51 for a helpful comparison between Johannine dualism and love expressions.

122 Volf, "Dualism," 43.

As previously noted, John does not tell but shows[123] what love is through various narratival elements, and such a literary strategy helps readers visualise and understand 'love' in a way that makes it more vivid and memorable in readers' minds. Jesus's love command urges the readers first to understand the love that is epitomised in Jesus's death on the cross and then to imitate and live out that love in their daily lives despite worldly challenges. This sacrificial love shown by Jesus has its origin from above (ἄνωθεν, 3:31) but is to be realised in this κόσμος (3:16) that does not know Jesus (1:10)—for that very reason God's love for the world is "the main motor which pushes [Jesus's] action toward the cross and the resurrection."[124]

2.2 *Unity*

The second trait that the disciples are called to imitate is unity, which is most vividly highlighted in ch. 17.

> 17:11 πάτερ ἅγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ὦσιν ἓν ***καθὼς*** ἡμεῖς.
>
> 17:21 ἵνα πάντες ἓν ὦσιν, ***καθὼς*** σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν
>
> 17:22 ὦσιν ἓν ***καθὼς*** ἡμεῖς ἕν

The nature of the Johannine unity is highly contested; some see it as mystical,[125] eucharistic,[126] ecumenical,[127] or functional.[128] Such wide disagreement among scholars shows how problematic but crucial this notion of unity is in the Gospel. The theme of unity is primarily conveyed by the numeral ἕν and is

123 The advantage of 'showing' is that though it may be less precise, it nonetheless "compels the reader to compare and evaluate different kinds of evidence." Instead of passively being told what love is, readers are encouraged to engage actively with different narratives in the Gospel and to come to a deeper understanding of the love shown by Jesus. Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52–53.

124 Volf, "Dualism," 40.

125 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 2:88.

126 Oscar Culmann, *Early Christian Worship* (trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance; London: SCM, 1956), 111.

127 T. Evan Pollard, "'That They All May Be One' (John xvii. 21)—and the Unity of the Church," *ExpTim* 70 (1958–1959): 149–150.

128 Johan Ferreira, *Johannine Ecclesiology* (JSNTSup 160; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 128.

firmly rooted in the unity between the Father and the Son as previously seen in the love relation. The numeral ἕν can carry both quantitative and qualitative nuances—the former signifies a numerical singularity as in "One God," whereas the latter denotes being united in essence or purpose. Richard Bauckham emphasises that in the early Jewish background the language of oneness almost always brought an echo of the *Shema* to the minds of the Jewish listeners (Deut 6:4; Ezek 37:16–22, 24; Mic 2:12; Hos 1:11; Isa 45:20a).[129] That is probably why the Jews were trying to stone Jesus when they heard Jesus speaking of being one with the Father (10:30–31).

John is not interested, however, in expounding the Jewish concept of the *Shema* itself, but rather redefines the exclusivity of God in order to incorporate the unity between the Father and the Son. Such a hermeneutical movement is evident in John's intentional use of the neuter ἕν (10:30) instead of the masculine εἷς (Deut 6:4). In other words, John nowhere tries to prove that the Father and the Son are one person but purposefully shifts the readers' attention to the fact that the Father and the Son are in unity (3:35; 5:19; 8:16; 8:19; 10:30, 38; 14:7).[130] As seen in the previous section, the unity between the Father and the Son is maintained by the Father's abounding love for the Son and the Son's selfless obedience to the Father. In fact there is no room for rivalry in this relationship since the Father and the Son are working towards the same vision of saving the world for the glory of one another (13:32; 17:1). This unity between the Father and the Son is not the end in itself but also serves as an example for the believing community to embody.

2.2.1 The Language of Oneness in the Book of Signs

Before moving on to the analysis of 17:11, 20–23, it seems necessary to review how John uses the language of oneness in the *Book of Signs*. The numeral εἷς appears twice in relation to unity in 10:16 and 11:52.

A. The first passage appears in the shepherd discourse where Jesus is portrayed as a good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. It was a common practice for the OT writers to describe a relationship between God and his people using the image of a shepherd and a flock (Gen 48:15; Pss 23; 28:9; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; Hos 4:16). John uses this well-known metaphor and applies it to the relationship between Jesus and his believers with a distinctive christological emphasis.[131] Verse 16

129 Bauckham, "Divine and Human Community," *Glory*, 21–42 (32).

130 Ferreira, *Ecclesiology*, 134.

131 Dongsoo Kim, *The Church in the Gospel of John* (PhD diss.: University of Cambridge, 1999), 27.

highlights the fact that Jesus's love for his own sheep extends to those who are not currently part of the fold. At an unspecified time, Jesus will bring them so that there will be μία ποίμνη, εἷς ποιμήν.[132] The controversial issue regarding this verse is whether the phrase ἄλλα πρόβατα refers to a different group of Jewish believers or the Gentiles. Though some scholars have argued for the inclusion of other remaining Jews,[133] the dominant position in Johannine scholarship leans toward the inclusion of the Gentiles.[134] In light of Jesus's emphasis on the world as a recipient of salvation (3:16–17; 4:42; 6:33; 6:51; 8:12), it is likely that Jesus here has in mind all his disciples "Jews or Gentile, present and future alike."[135]

B. The second passage, 11:52 is very similar to 10:16 in that both verses are mainly concerned with the gathering of the scattered people of God. Unlike 10:16, John no longer uses the shepherd-sheep motif but uses the phrase that readers are already familiar with, τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεου.[136] In 1:12 readers have already read that the children of God are those who are not born of blood nor the will of the flesh or man but of God. As the sheep are recognised by the shepherd only by responding to the voice of the shepherd (10:4), people are recognised by God only by responding positively to Jesus's call (1:12) and by being born again by water and spirit (3:5).[137] The context in which 11:52 appears seems to indicate that Jesus's impending death on the cross is primarily for the 'people' (λαός, 11:50), which is identified more specifically as the children of God in v. 52. In ch. 8 John has already made explicitly clear that the Jews' physical link to Abraham does not make them the children of God (8:39–40) but only those who love the Son whom God sent (8:42). As Pancaro suggests, "there is no pre-existing unity. It comes to be only at the moment of and because

132 Similarly, the Jews also believe that the Messianic shepherd will bring them into one (Isa 40:11; Jer 3:15; 23:4–6; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24; Zech 13:7–9).

133 Most notably, J. Louis Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 90–121; John A. Dennis, *Jesus's Death and the Gathering of True Israel* (WUNT II/217; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

134 Beasley-Murray, *John*, 171; Brown, *John*, 1:396; Barrett, *John*, 376; Lindars, *John*, 363, and many others.

135 Michaels, *John*, 590.

136 Vanderlip argues that the term 'children of God' signifies the believer's filial relationship with God and is a "qualitative phrase that is descriptive of their inner life, of their new allegiance, and of their new sense of values." Geroge Vanderlip, *Christianity According to John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 73–74.

137 J.L. D'Aragon, "La notion johannique de l'unité," *ScEccl* 11 (1959): 111–119 (115–116).

of Christ's death."[138] Thus it is the gathering of both the Jews and the Gentiles that John has in mind, and the unity in the Johannine sense includes all believers.

This brief analysis reveals that John accomplishes two things through the language of oneness in the first twelve chapters. First, John puts forward the idea that one of the central aims of Jesus's death on the cross is to unite believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who may be scattered abroad (12:32). Second, John builds up the idea of unity before the Farewell Discourse so that readers are prepared to understand more fully when Jesus demands his disciples and readers to be one as the Father and the Son are one.

2.2.2 Unity in the Prayer of Jesus (17:11, 20–23)

John 17 stands out from the previous Farewell Discourse in that it takes the shape of prayer, and many scholars have noted its similarity with prayers in the OT (e.g. the Song of Moses in Deut 32) as well as in Jewish testaments (T. Job, 43:1–17; T. Isaac, 8:6–7; T. Jacob, 8:6–9; cf. Jub. 1:19–21; 10:3–6; 20–22).[139] Despite its overlap with some of the earlier Jewish writings, it is very likely that John has "produced something quite distinctive and unique, firmly marked by the Johannine Christology."[140] Readers should not be carried away, however, by its abrupt change in literary form since it recaptures the main themes from the previous chapters[141] and shares with those chapters its focus as fundamentally "didactic."[142] John 17 can be divided largely into three sections:[143] vv. 1–5 (Jesus's prayer for his glorification); vv. 6–19 (Jesus's prayer for his disciples); vv. 20–26 (Jesus's prayer for his future believers). The main focus of our investigation will be on vv. 20–23 in which the motif of oneness is most brightly highlighted.

At its most basic level, the unity in Jesus's prayer should be understood as the unity of love since, as seen above, John has a tendency to develop his earlier

138 Severino Pancaro, "'People of God' in St John's Gospel," *NTS* 16 (1970): 114–129 (127).

139 Francis J. Moloney, *Glory not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 102–103.

140 Schnackenburg, *John*, III:200.

141 According to Moloney, the content of 14:1–31 is further elaborated in 16:4–33, and similarly John takes the theme of 13:1–38 to the deeper level in 17:1–26. Francis J. Moloney, "The Function of John 13–17 within the Johannine Narrative," in *"What is John?": Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; 2 vols.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 2:59.

142 Moloney, "Function," 2:59.

143 For a helpful analysis of the structure of John 17, see Edward Malatesta, "The Literary Structure of John 17," *Bib* 52 (1971): 190–214.

ideas more clearly in later chapters.[144] It is especially noteworthy that ἀγαπάω is used four times in the last four verses of ch. 17 (17:23 (2×); 17:24; 17:26). All these four instances underline that the unity that John has in mind is intimately related to theme of love in the earlier chapters. To put it more concretely, "love produces and is reflected in unity."[145] To say that the Johannine unity is a unity of love, however, is only half the story. In the previous section, Jesus prays for his disciples by asking the Father to sanctify them as Jesus sanctified himself for their sake. The verb *consecrate* (ἁγιάζω) is used four times in the whole Gospel (10:36; 17:17; 17:19(×2)), and the motif of consecration in all of these verses is directly linked to the motif of 'being sent'.[146] Being consecrated is then not an end in itself but the theme of consecration "is tantamount to separating, to preparing the disciples for the service to God."[147]

Jesus knows that his disciples will be persecuted because they are not of the world (17:14); nonetheless, Jesus does not ask the Father to remove his disciples from the world but rather to keep them safe from the evil one (17:15). What that signifies is that no matter how hostile the world might be to believers, they have a mission to accomplish in this world. For that reason, the Father's protection for them is critical but consecration is even more essential because what is intended here is not mere survival but the disciples' active, effective engagement with the world so that their unity becomes a witness to others who are not yet part of the flock. In that respect, the unity in Jesus's prayer should not be understood simply as a static relationship between believers that is introvert and has no regard whatsoever for the outside world. On the contrary, believers' unity should be dynamic and lively enough to cause interest among the people who witness it. This brief analysis of the immediate context reveals that the Johannine unity embodies love but goes far beyond it since the unity among believers has a function[148] of showing the world that Jesus is from God.

2.2.3 The Basis of Unity

Despite making some progress over the nature and purpose of unity, it is still unclear what the basis for such unity is. The problem with this question is that direct evidence is quite meagre in the text. One of the correctives in such a

144 Moloney, "Function," 2.

145 Ferreira, *Ecclesiology*, 130.

146 Richard Bauckham, "The Holiness of Jesus and His Disciples in the Gospel of John," *Testimony*, 253–269 (266). Cf. Musa V.M. Kunene, *Communal Holiness in the Gospel of John* (Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2012), 207.

147 Ridderbos, *John*, 555.

148 Ferreira calls it "a unity in function, or more particularly a unity in sending." Ferreira, *Ecclesiology*, 128.

case is to study the phenomenon that is on the other end of the spectrum. In this Gospel, the concept that is most opposite to the notion of unity is schism (σχίσμα). The word σχίσμα appears three times in the Gospel (7:43; 9:16; 10:19), all caused by the people's conflicting evaluations of Jesus's identity. John has already pointed out in 7:24 that such a misunderstanding about Jesus's identity is caused primarily by the people's false judgment based on appearance (ὄψις), not according to right judgment. Those who misunderstand Jesus do so because they judge the words and actions of Jesus based on their long-held religious and social convictions. For example, the Jews grumble about Jesus's teachings because they regard Jesus as a teacher without credentials for they know who Jesus's parents are (6:42) or the Jews try to stone Jesus because they only comprehend Jesus's words in light of their religious tradition (8:39–59). The Samaritan woman is a prime example, however, who rises above the commonly held social and religious expectations and takes up courage to trust the words of Jesus at face value. Because of the woman's right judgment, her townspeople have come to believe in Jesus's words and thus have become united in their faith in Jesus. Then one thing becomes clear—belief in Jesus brings unity among people, whereas unbelief destroys unity.[149]

What this preliminary observation seems to indicate is that 'being one' means leaving behind one's personal perception of what is right and wrong behind and embracing the new standard (both ethical and spiritual) and mission offered by Jesus. In fact, Jesus maintains his unity with the Father by aligning his will perfectly with that of the Father—Jesus does only what he sees the Father doing (5:19; 8:38); Jesus seeks only the will of the Father (5:30); Jesus teaches only as he was taught by the Father (7:16; 8:28); Jesus seeks the glory of the Father (7:18; 8:50, 54). If Jesus's words and actions reflect and are rooted in the will of the Father and if that is what makes Jesus united with the Father, the disciples' words and actions should also reflect and be rooted in Jesus's teachings in order for them to be united with one another. Therefore, divisions occur when people take Jesus's words lightly and thus make false judgments about Jesus's identity based on their distorted perspective of who the Messiah

149 Such a functional aspect of unity can be realised in the lives of believers only through their union with the Father and the Son (αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὦσιν, 17:21). As seen in the love section, "apart from union with God, Jesus's disciples have no hope of creating unity among themselves." In order to establish unity with other believers horizontally, one must be in unity with God vertically. This reality is best described by the vine imagery (15:1–8) where the metaphor clearly highlights that only those branches that are attached to the vine (Jesus) can be united since those that are not attached to the vine are thrown into the fire. R. Alan Culpepper, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Fourth Gospel," *Word*, 85–108 (93).

is, whereas unity is achieved when believers begin to uphold the words of Jesus supremely against their personal opinions or interests.

2.2.4 External Characteristics of Unity

Having examined the basis of unity, we still need to answer what outward form this unity would take in the actual world. In other words, what are the external characteristics of unity that are observable to the world? First, an interesting observation may be noted in regard to the titles given to believers, which may signify the kind of relationship that is expected among believers. One of the noteworthy observations found in these titles (children of God (1:12; 11:52); sheep (10:1–18); servants (12:26; 13:16); branches (15:5); friends (15:13)) is that all of them carry an egalitarian tone[150] and there is "no hint of rank and no room for jockey for position."[151] For that reason, dominance over others is neither encouraged nor taught in the Gospel; rather believers are to be one by submitting themselves under the Lordship of Jesus. Such an egalitarian vision becomes even clearer when we examine Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the blind man. Nowhere in these narratives does Jesus show favouritism to any of them based on their gender, social status, ethnic origin but he treats them equally as if they belong to the same social stratification. Thus any believer who takes advantage of others in hierarchical relationships or even thinks of oneself better than others for any reason must come to terms with the fact that Jesus came to abolish any form of superiority or dominance over others. Such a counter-intuitive vision espoused by the believers shows the world that a new order has arrived through the coming of Jesus.

Second, John highlights another reason that destroys unity among people, namely, being consumed with their own glory. In the first two chapters of the Gospel δόξα[152] appears three times (1:14 (×2); 2:11) and is used exclusively in relation to Jesus only. In later chapters, however, δόξα begins to be used in relation to both Jesus and people. One of the differences between Jesus and people in handling glory is that Jesus has no concern whatsoever for his own glory (5:41; 7:18; 8:50; 8:54), whereas people love the glory that comes from men (5:44; 12:43) and are thus blinded "to the reality of the true δόξα."[153] The glory of God, according to Caird, is "God's own essential worth, greatness, power, majesty,

150 John E. Staton, "A Vision of Unity—Christian Unity in the Fourth Gospel," *EvQ* 69 (1997): 291–305 (299).

151 Staton, "Unity," ibid.

152 For a comprehensive semantical analysis of δοξάζω, see G.B. Caird, "The Glory of God in the Fourth Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical Semantics," *NTS* 15 (1969): 265–277.

153 Caird, "Glory," 270.

everything in him which calls forth man's adoring reverence; and this glory has been shared from all eternity by the Logos (17:5)."[154] The glory that Jesus reveals in his signs has the purpose of drawing all people to Jesus himself so that they would also share in this glory (17:22). The glory that believers receive from Jesus also has the similar function of leading them into unity, which in turn becomes the powerful testimony to the world that Jesus is indeed sent by God (17:23). Then the glory in John's Gospel is never to be used for the personal use of promoting oneself over others but only for bringing people out of the world to Jesus. In fact, ironically, Jesus's glory is most gloriously manifested at the cross where Jesus lays down all of his privileges as the Son of God to die for the sins of the world (1:29).[155] Then disunity creeps in when people falsely pursue the glory for themselves (12:43) that should be ascribed only to the Father and the Son,[156] and this leaves people in direct opposition to each other and ultimately to Jesus.

Readers have already seen one figure who sets an extraordinary example for readers in this regard—John the Baptist. What makes John distinct from Jesus's opponents and even Jesus's own disciples is that he knows his role exactly as the instrument for making straight the way of the Lord (1:23) and does not accept any flattering remarks both from the crowds and even his own disciples (1:21; 3:26, 28). John recognises himself as a friend of the bridegroom whose greatest joy is nothing but to hear the voice of the bridegroom (3:29). In other words, as Jesus is only concerned with making the Father known to the world, John is also interested only in making Jesus known to the world. Thus when the Jews inquire of him whether he is the coming Messiah, he utterly rejects any messianic titles for himself (1:20) and further makes it clear to his disciples that he is not the Christ (3:28). Despite John's critical role in making the way for Jesus, John's last word echoes powerfully in the ears of those at the scene and readers: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (3:30).[157] John's ministry does not present any threat but rather is in a perfect unity with that of Jesus since John is always conscious of his limited role as the voice in the wilderness (3:23). Therefore, John is nowhere said to enter into any conflict not only with Jesus but also with other believers because he is a man of self-giving instead of being self-concerned.

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154 Caird, "Glory," 269.

155 Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Glory of God in John's Gospel and Revelation," in *The Glory of God* (eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 107–126 (119).

156 W. Robert Cook, "The 'Glory' Motif in the Johannine Corpus," *JETS* 27 (1984): 291–297 (293).

157 Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 95.

2.2.5 Conclusion

The notion of unity in John's Gospel does not refer to a monolithic gathering of believers but Jesus's call for unity rather carries a much more expansive and far-reaching vision that overcomes any social, economic, gender, and ethnic differences. Such a unity is different from the one that is commonly seen in the world where people are moved to unity only when their self-interest is served. Unity as exemplified both by Jesus and John the Baptist is, however, fundamentally self-denying in nature; Jesus becomes one with the Father through his selfless obedience and John the Baptist is also in harmony with Jesus and other believers through his self-effacing role of making the way for Jesus. Only those who are willing to forgo their personal benefits can be united around the common goal of obeying "Jesus's call to self-sacrifice or radical rejection of the allurements of this world."[158] This kind of unity is startling to those in the world since they are consumed only with the glory coming from men (12:43), and thus the believers' willingness to be united around their allegiance to the Lord despite its demand for sacrifice testifies powerfully to the world that Jesus is sent by God.[159]

2.3 *Mission*

This section will investigate another trait that Jesus wants his disciples to imitate, that is being sent into the world. The passages we will explore are as follows:

> 17:18 ***καθὼς*** ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, κἀγὼ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον·
>
> 20:21 ***καθὼς*** ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω.

Many scholars have labelled the Gospel of John as a sectarian writing due to its strong dualistic worldview and narrow socio-religious boundaries,[160] and such a conception of the Gospel has often prevented a meaningful discussion regarding John's ethics. The word *sectarian* can be misleading for many modern readers since it usually brings up the image of removing oneself from or renouncing the world for the sake of religious purity or social solidarity. Sectar-

158 Smith, "Ethics," *Word*, 121.

159 Argued similarly by Koester, *Word of Life*, 202.

160 See esp. Martyn, *History and Theology*; Meeks, "Man from Heaven."

ianism is, however, a much more complex social phenomenon which cannot be defined simply in the 'us versus them' dichotomy.[161]

Some scholars go so far as to argue that John intentionally uses anti-language, which "is not intended to be decoded or to reveal … [but] to create distance."[162] In other words, these scholars insist that anti-language is utilised throughout the Gospel not in the same way as literary techniques such as irony or misunderstanding but rather to deliberately bewilder outsiders by transforming the everyday language into a coded-language.[163] In such an alleged sectarian context, John's ethics would certainly have limited relevance for those outside the community, and Meeks' negative evaluation of John's ethics would not be too off the mark. The central focus of this section is to examine how the Johannine theme of mission shapes the disciples' attitude towards the world and their opponents and thus their moral outlook.

2.3.1 Attitudes towards the World

Those who want to underline the sectarian nature of the Gospel must come to terms with the Gospel's heavy emphasis on mission. The exact definition of mission is still debated among scholars but the fact that the theme of mission is dominant throughout the Gospel is undeniable. It is interesting to note that John in the first part of the Gospel focuses on the mission of Jesus, which is primarily conveyed by the signs and works that Jesus performs.[164] Jesus does not, however, simply perform the signs to show the glory of God only to

161 For a helpful sociological analysis which regards the notion of Johannine sectarianism as problematic, see Timothy J.M. Ling, *The Judean Poor and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 136; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146–167; Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran* (NovTSup 119; Leiden: Brill, 2005). Also a position against Johannine sectarianism from a theological perspective, see Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ* (WUNT II/120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 197–219.

162 Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "What is the Matter with Nicodemus?: A Social Science Perspective on John 3:1–21," in *The New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 175–184 (183).

163 For a comprehensive work on this particular issue of language, see Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1993). For a helpful critique of arguments for anti-language, see David A. Lamb, *Text, Context and the Johannine Community: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Johannine Writings* (LNTS 477; London: Bloomsbury 2014), 103–143.

164 For a helpful discussion of the role of 'signs' and 'works' in Johannine mission, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 54–70.

the already-believing disciples but to fulfill the mission commissioned by the Father, that is to bring salvation to the world (3:16) by revealing the Father's salvific plan.

Here Jesus's mission is motivated by God's love for the world and is carried out by Jesus's obedience to the Father. In other words, "Jesus's mission is the result of the action of God, who gives and sends his Son … [because] God loves the world so much."[165] Such an intimate oneness between the Father and the Son is highlighted as early as in the prologue where the Word is said to be with God from the beginning (1:1) and Jesus's oneness with the Father becomes the basis for his mission. In the second half of the Gospel, John focuses on the mission of the disciples, which is to continue and expand the mission of Jesus through bearing fruit (15:16) and doing greater things (14:12). In fact, Jesus's charge to his disciples to love and to be united with one another is not only directed to an inner circle of believers but is directly connected to the notion of mission since love and unity are the primary means by which believers show the world that they belong to Jesus (13:35; 17:23). As Jesus's love and unity with the Father ultimately lead to the salvation of the world, believers' love and unity among themselves must also serve as "the foundation for the re-presentation of Jesus to the world."[166]

Despite the crucial role love and unity play in mission, one must realise that love and unity in and of themselves do not constitute mission. What is further needed is the actual sending of workers to the field to harvest fruit that are fully ripened.[167] That is why we see Jesus making explicit comments twice about sending his disciples in 17:18 and 20:21.[168] Like the two love commands given by Jesus, these two passages, though similar in its content, stress two different aspects of mission. First, in 17:18 Jesus clearly emphasises that the scope of mission is the entire world.[169] As Nissen rightly notes, "both sending, Christ's and the believer's, are to the world."[170] Both Jesus and believers are sent into the world to save it, not to judge it (3:16–17; 17:21, 23, 25). On the other hand, in 20:21 the focus is shifted to Jesus as the sender of the disciples. It is important

165 Moloney, *Love*, 59.

166 Köstenberger, *Missions*, 189.

167 Köstenberger, *Missions*, ibid.

168 The theme of mission is not restricted only to these passages. Köstenberger argues that the survey of mission in John's Gospel must be extended to those passages that deal with 'activity involving movement' and 'the accomplishment of a task'. Köstenberger, *Missions*, 27–37.

169 For a comprehensive discussion of the concept, 'world', see Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, The Epistles, and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 115–145.

170 Johannes Nissen, "Mission in the Fourth Gospel," *New Readings*, 213–231 (217).

to note that Jesus's sending of his disciples is directly dependent upon the Father's sending of his Son, which appears heavily throughout the Gospel (3:16–17; 5:23, 30, 36; 8:16, 18, 26, 28–29; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3, 8, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). In the first half of the Gospel Jesus is mainly portrayed as the one who was sent by the Father but as his time for departure draws near, Jesus himself becomes the sender who sends the disciples to the world.[171] The sending of the disciples then shows that "though the mission was defined in Christ and enabled by his once-for-all ministry, it was not completed by him" (14:12).[172] Thus what has been left undone by Jesus should be completed by the disciples, who will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the mission to completion (15:26; 16:13).

What is then the fundamental attitude or mindset of those who are sent into the world? Unlike those who see the Gospel as anti-world in its attitude, God does not abandon the world as if it were irredeemable but rather sends the *Word* into the world to bring the light to everyone (πάντα ἄνθρωπον, 1:9). Here Jesus enters the world not so much as a warrior entering a conquered territory but as a vulnerable and mortal human being entering a hostile, unwelcoming territory. Such an image of Jesus is not too implausible since Jesus accepts complete solidarity with human beings by taking on flesh (1:14), and the world is also said to neither know nor receive him (1:10–11). Despite the Johannine Jesus being often treated by scholars as loftier than the figure of Jesus portrayed in the Synoptics, the Gospel clearly reveals the human side of Jesus (4:6–7; 11:33, 35, 38; 12:27; 13:21; 19:28) that is subject to human weakness. Jesus's coming into the world by taking on flesh signifies a transition or a change in status from the infinitely exalted to the infinitely lowly. Unlike Käsemann's docetic view, which sees Jesus's death simply as a continuation of Jesus's pre-existent glory, Jesus's death "does effect change: in Jesus's own status, in God's relationship to the world, and among the disciples."[173] In fact, Jesus foresees his upcoming death early on in the narrative (2:19) and rejects anything that prevents him from fulfilling the mission of God that is to be culminated in his death on the cross.[174]

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171 Köstenberger notes four characteristics of the sent one as follows: "(1) bringing glory and honor to the sender; (2) doing the sender's will, working his works, and speaking his words; (3) witnessing to the sender and representing him accurately; (4) knowing the sender intimately, living in close relationship with the sender, and following his example." Köstenberger, *Missions*, 191.

172 Clinton D. Morrison, "Mission and Ethic: An Interpretation of John 17," *Int* XIX (1965): 259–273 (270).

173 Thompson, *Incarnate Word*, 103.

174 For Bultmann, the cross is nothing more than an entry to Jesus's glory, whereas Forestell sees the cross as the central salvific event that shows God's love for mankind. See Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:53–55; Forestell, *Cross*.

What becomes clear is that Jesus's attitude towards the world is one that is shaped by his love for and his willingness to obey the Father whose desire is to see the world redeemed through his Son (3:16–17). If Jesus's mission is directly motivated by the Father's mission, the purpose of Jesus's sending of his disciples must be also aligned with the purpose of God's sending of his own Son, that is to bring salvation to the world. As Moloney insightfully puts, "God's act of loving the world initiates the cycle of the sending of the Son that culminates in his crucifixion and exaltation … God's love makes the gift of eternal life possible and the mission of Jesus is to make that love known."[175] Thus judgment is a derivative or should be understood as a last resort, not as a primary intention of the Father or the Son. The purpose of the mutual loving relationship between the Father and the Son is then not only to "make life better for believers but … to enable mission."[176]

The disciples' attitude towards the world should not be too different from that of Jesus since the disciples are sent to complete the mission of Jesus. As Okure rightly suggests, "every missionary endeavor of every age means essentially and fundamentally a harvesting, a reaping of the fruit of the work of salvation accomplished definitively by Jesus and the Father."[177] If the prologue implies the sending of Jesus by the Father (1:18; cf. 3:17), Jesus's reinstating and commissioning of Peter as shepherd in John 21[178] implies Jesus's sending of his disciples to the world. According to Beasley-Murray, Jesus's charge to Peter to feed and tend the sheep highlights "the aspect of the Shepherd's calling to seek the lost sheep and gather them into the flock, hence the aspect of *mission*."[179] In other words, the Gospel of John begins and ends with the emphasis on mis-

175 Moloney, *Love*, 61.

176 Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Sensitivity to Outsiders in John's Gospel and Letters and its Implication for the Understanding of Early Christian Mission," in *Sensitivity towards Outsiders* (eds. Jacobus Kok, et al.; WUNT II/364; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 171–186 (182). Cf. Similarly, Coloe argues that the Johannine Jesus looks forward to the "future fruitfulness (12.25) of the Gentile mission in the time of the later community." Mary Coloe, "Gentiles in the Gospel of John: Narrative Possibilities—John 12.12–43," in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (eds. David C. Sim and James S. Mclaren; LNTS 499; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 209–223 (223).

177 Okure, *Mission*, 164.

178 The question of whether ch. 21 is a later addition does not pose any problem since this work primarily works with the final form of the text. For a helpful analysis of this issue, see Francis J. Moloney, "John 21 and the Johannine Story," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (eds. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore; SBLRBS 55; Atlanta: Socity of Biblical Literature, 2008), 237–251.

179 Beasley-Murray, *John*, 407.

sion. In that sense, the core of Johannine discipleship is geared towards mission since even love, which is the definitive evidence of true discipleship, is not intended to merely maintain the status quo of the believing community but to bear fruit by extending forgiveness (20:23) and bearing witness to the world about Jesus in cooperation with the Holy Spirit (15:26–27).[180] Such a mission "cannot be accomplished in isolation from the world but requires proximity."[181]

What is more profound is that the disciples are sent into the world despite their forthcoming rejection and persecution by the world. As seen previously, Jesus's prayer for them in John 17 clearly signifies that the disciples are not to be taken out of the world but rather to be sanctified so that they can be ready for something as harsh as martyrdom as seen in the case of Peter (21:19). Though it is not explicitly stated what kind of attitude the believers should have as they go into the world, John seems to highlight the fact that love is what motivates and propels the mission (3:16), and that love (along with unity) should be actualised first within the believing community in order to have "an initial appeal for those in the world."[182] That same love must then go beyond the believing community since the disciples' missional endeavour would not have been successful "if the community's love did not reach beyond its own boundaries … [or] accompanied by hostility toward the group's opponents."[183]

2.3.2 Does John's Gospel Promote Universal Mission?

So far, we have discussed the kind of attitude that the disciples should possess as they go into the world but we still need to ask further whether Johannine mission encourages universal mission or mission only to a certain elected group of people. This issue has already been touched on at several points in the previous chapters but here the issue will be dealt with from a somewhat different angle. As previously noted, Jesus's commissioning of the disciples for mission appears twice in the Gospel (17:18; 20:21). What is noteworthy about these passages is that both of them are found in the context where the persecution is either predicted or realised. In the case of Jesus's first commissioning of the disciples (17:18), the persecution for believers is being clearly foretold by Jesus (15:18–20;

180 For a helpful discussion on the relationship between mission and the Holy Spirit, see Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 198–204.

181 Köstenberger, "Sensitivity," 182.

182 Köstenberger, *Missions*, 190.

183 David Rensberger, "Love for One Another and Love for Enemies in the Gospel of John," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (ed. Willard M. Swartley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 297–313 (307).

16:2), whereas in Jesus's second commissioning (20:21) the disciples are already confronted with the fear of the Jews after the crucifixion of Jesus (20:19). What these passages signify is that the disciples are "sent into the realm of evil where they will meet opposition and suffer rejection, even as Jesus did (1:10–11)."[184] Put differently, the scope of Johannine mission is not restricted only to a group of people who gladly accept the truth but the disciples are also sent into the midst of those who may be offended and even be willing to kill them because of the truth they proclaim.

The fact that there is high emphasis on persecution surrounding Jesus's commissioning of the disciples may show that the world, however inimical it may be towards the believers, is not to be forsaken but to be overcome by God's redeeming love and the forgiveness of sins (20:23). In fact, the very first words Jesus utters in his encounter with his disciples after resurrection is somewhat surprising: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (20:21). Even after the crucifixion, Jesus never commands the disciples to withdraw from the world but rather commands them to go out into the world by exemplifying the truth through love and unity. Even the peace that Jesus extends to his disciples at this critical moment is for the sake of equipping them for mission, not just for their internal comfort. It is important to stress that persecution comes from the outsiders, not the insiders, and the reason why Jesus warns his disciples of the coming persecution is that Jesus expects them to go deep into the world with the message that could provoke violence among those who find the message scandalous. Thus the sectarian group that segregates itself from the rest of the world is not compatible with the Johannine worldview since Jesus's missionary charge goes far beyond the friendly frontier.

Here the universal aspect of mission could function as a hermeneutical leverage against those passages that seem to advocate soteriological determinism.[185] It is true that the Johannine Jesus affirms that those who believe are drawn by the Father (6:44; 12:32) but it is also true that the same Jesus also identifies the κόσμος as the object of God's salvation and love. Furthermore, the boundary between believers and unbelievers is not clear-cut but blurry in John's gospel. As seen previously, some scholars find Johannine determinism irreconcilable but recent studies on characterisation have focused on ambiguous characters who seem to be placed within a gray zone where both belief and unbelief coexist. In other words, ambiguity as a literary (rhetorical) element

184 Robert Kysar, "'As You Sent Me': Identity and Mission in the Fourth Gospel," *ww* XXI (2001): 370–376 (373).

185 Culpepper, "Inclusivism," 85–108.

seems to counterbalance John's somewhat strong language on determinism. Volf helpfully comments on this issue, using Nicodemus as an example: "He [John] lets Nicodemus blur the boundaries—not a sign of a mind that thinks only in black and white. Sure, John operates with an "elect—non-elect" dualism, and therefore, there is ultimately a firm line separating one from the other. But only God knows where that line is. The author of the Gospel seems comfortable with leaving things undecided, at least in some cases."[186] Thus Culpepper insightfully writes that "to resolve them [the tensions and the paradoxes] either on the side of inclusivism or exclusivism would be to offer only one side of the truth."[187]

The Gospel's focus on the universal mission is, however, not only crucial for balancing the tensions between inclusivism and exclusivism but also for promoting a moral vision, which all Christians are expected to embrace after conversion.[188] As seen in Chapter 2, prophetic religions like Christianity require their new converts to embrace both new beliefs and new moral values. What that implies is that the focus of mission must be both evangelistic/apologetic and ethical in its aim since people are converted both to a new belief and a new lifestyle. Furthermore, the fact that John includes stories of Samaritans (John 4) and Gentiles (John 12) may show that the Gospel encourages a community of believers that is comprised of mixed ethnic groups.[189] Then the Johannine mission demands the harvesters to go beyond merely communicating a set of doctrines to a sectarian group but to "forge a harmonious communal identity"[190] among those who may come from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

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186 Volf, "Dualism," 45.

187 Culpepper, "Inclusivism," 106. MacRae's similarly suggests, "the Fourth Evangelist may have tried deliberately to incorporate a diversity of backgrounds into the one gospel message precisely to emphasize the universality of Jesus." George W. MacRae, "The Fourth Gospel and *Religionsgeschichte*," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 13–24 (15).

188 Ben Witherington notes how the authors of the New Testament did their theologising and ethicising as follows: "it was emphasized that all, or almost all of these persons were Jews who became convinced that when Jesus of Nazareth entered history, the eschatological salvation and royal reign of God upon the earth had broken into human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and through his work. This shared conviction shaped how they viewed their symbolic universe and how they revised their storied world and thus theologizing and ethicizing they did out of that storied world." Ben Witherington III, *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 1:815.

189 Similarly argued by Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 339–343.

190 Adele Reinhartz, "Forging a New Identity: Johannine Rhetoric and the Audience of the Fourth Gospel," in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer* (eds. Jan Krans, et al.; NovTSup 149; Leiden: Brill, 2013), (123–134) 128.

Reinhartz contends that in order to forge a harmonious communal identity, the early Christians were encouraged to distance[191] themselves from their groups of origin: "Samaritans needed to acknowledge that "the hour is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21); the Gentiles needed to accept that God was one, and that Jesus was a part of God's unity (10:30)."[192]

Put another way, the Johannine mission is not interested in shaping the ethos of a homogeneous community but rather of an ethnically and socially mixed group of Christians[193] who "were exhorted and encouraged to behave in a manner … in accordance with their particular worldview."[194] In that sense, Jesus's commissioning of his disciples for mission carries ethical connotations not only because conversion implies that those who are in darkness are transferred to light (1:9; 3:21; 8:12; 12:36, 46) and are also set free from sin (8:34) but also because it demands believers to relinquish any form of social or religious privileges in order to welcome outsiders into their community. Moreover, this missionary calling is no longer applicable only to the twelve disciples but to all the believers; those who were once slave to sin are now sent out to challenge the world both with the preaching of eternal life in Christ and through their life of love and unity.

2.3.3 Conclusion

Many scholars have highlighted the deficiency of John's ethics due to its lack of emphasis on love for those outside the community. A careful examination of the theme of mission has revealed, however, that John's Gospel does not promote a sectarian mentality among its readers but rather encourages them to engage the world with the message of eternal life and liberation from sin given through Jesus. Though some scholars argue that the missional focus does not necessarily require the believers to love those to whom they proclaim, love and mission cannot be separated as if they were distinct from each other. If God

191 Here 'distance' does not mean 'abandon' since "Jesus does not claim to bring a new god or for that matter a new religion, but that He claims to continue the true religion of the God of Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah." Jan G. van der Watt, "Salvation in the Gospel According to John," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (ed. Jan G. van der Watt; NovTSup 121; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101–131 (104).

192 Reinhartz, "New Identity," 128.

193 Due to this openness to outsiders, it is important to recognise in our exploration of John's ethics that "covenant with God was no longer the special privilege of the Jews, [but] the community forged through faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God replaced the Jews in their covenantal relationship with God." Reinhartz, "New Identity," 128.

194 Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Finding a Basis for Interpreting New Testament Ethos from a Greco-Roman Philosphical Perspective," *Ethics*, 53–82 (60).

loves the world, it is necessary that Jesus also loves the world since the Son does only what he sees the Father doing (5:19). Likewise, the believers are to love the world since it is the mission of Jesus and ultimately of the Father that they are sent to accomplish. So there is a chain reaction, which starts with the Father's love for the world, which must be passed on to the Son and ultimately to the believers. The lack of proper language of love for outsiders (enemies) does not necessarily mean that John's Gospel discourages such loving behaviour towards unbelievers; on the contrary, the high emphasis on mission greatly undermines any allegation against John's Gospel as being sectarian and unsympathetic towards those who are in darkness. After all, the strategy for mission found in this Gospel is not in a form of coercion but rather of inspiration that results in continuing love and sacrifice on the part of believers for those who persecute them.

2.4 *'Ex-Status*

The final area that Jesus wants his followers to imitate is that of his ἐκ-status which emphasises Jesus's derivation as not being of this world (17:14, 16, and 18:36). This section will examine the following passages in order to reveal how ἐκ-status is intimately interconnected with one's behaviour and ultimately influences one's overall ethical perception.

> 17:14 ὁ κόσμος ἐμίσησεν αὐτούς, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ***καθὼς*** ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ***ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου***.
>
> 17:16 ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ εἰσὶν ***καθὼς*** ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ***ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου***.
>
> 18:36 ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ***ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου*** τούτου.

In Johannine scholarship, the notion of 'ἐκ-status' or 'otherworldliness' is often highlighted and understood in light of the descent-ascent motif[195] and more recently, within the apocalyptic portrayal of Jesus.[196] These works tend to emphasise the heavenly/otherworldly aspect of the Johannine Jesus and the apocalyptic nature of John's Gospel. In light of these emphases, passages such

195 Most notably, Meeks, "Man from Heaven."

196 Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland, eds., *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013); Benjamin E. Reynolds, *The Apocalyptic Son of Man in the Gospel of John* (WUNT II/249; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 383–406.

as 17:14 and 16 where Jesus states that he and his disciples are not of this world, are often seen as promoting "a sectarian or anti-imperialist consciousness."[197] What should be observed, however, is that these passages (17:14, 16) that stress the ἐκ-status of Jesus and the disciples are immediately followed by Jesus's call for sanctification (17:17) and mission (17:18), and are also separated by Jesus's prayer for the protection of his disciples *within* the world (7:15). This immediate context shows that ἐκ-status in John's Gospel is not primarily concerned with promoting socio-political separation from the world but rather presupposes active engagement with the world while keeping oneself pure from the worldly pressures and temptations for the purpose of influencing the world. In other words, there is a tension between 'not being influenced by the world' and 'influencing the world'. Hence the notion of ἐκ-status seems to be significant for two reasons: first, it emphasises the fact that the believers do not belong to the world since their identity or salvation comes from an otherworldly source; second, the believers' ἐκ-status must be reflected in one's desire to be holy (17:17) and to be mission-minded (17:18) for the sake of challenging the world with the truth. Thus ἐκ-status in John's Gospel functions as an identity marker, which reinforces believers' distinctiveness as the people of God.

What has not been emphasised, however, in the traditional interpretation of the Johannine notion of ἐκ-status is its powerful implications for ethical reasoning and motivation. According to Keck, John uses the preposition ἐκ very deliberately to show that "what is decisive about a person is neither self generated nor self-defined … [but] is wholly contingent at the center where the self is constituted."[198] In other words, ἐκ functions as a hermeneutical signpost by which one's identity or derivation is revealed (1:13; 3:6, 8, 31; 6:41, 51, 65; 8:41–42, 44, 47; 10:16, 26). If Keck's analysis is valid, Jesus's emphasis on his ἐκ-status is intimately related and relevant to the notion of identity, which is foundational in giving shape and meaning to a person's life. How one sees oneself in terms of origin and affiliation can have a tremendous impact on how one behaves in a given situation or reacts to external influences (whether positive or negative).

The role of personal identity in moral formation is further enhanced when one's identity is shared by significant others by becoming part of a larger social or religious group. The norms promoted by the group can help "group members construe the world and determine appropriate behaviour in new and ambigu-

197 Judith M. Lieu, "Text and Authority in John and Apocalyptic," in *Intimations of Apocalyptic*, 235–253 (235).

198 Keck, "Derivation," 283.

ous situations by bringing order and predictability to their environment."[199] Of course, identity does not always produce a consistent behavioural pattern in a person's life but it is generally accepted that identity is one of the most significant motivators of behaviour. Then how does being 'not of this world' help readers define their identity and thus shape their behaviour? To examine the relationship between identity and behaviour, the following section will focus first on how identity determines behaviour in the case of both Jesus and individuals in the *Book of Signs*.

2.4.1 Jesus's Identity and His Behaviour in the Book of Signs

A dynamic between identity and behaviour can be readily seen in the way Jesus responds to the Father. From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus is fully aware of his identity as the one sent by the Father and thus he does not do anything according to his own will but only according to the Father's will and timing. In ch. 2 Jesus is asked by his mother to do something about the situation of having no wine left for the wedding and Jesus responds as follows: "My time (ἡ ὥρα μου) has not yet come" (2:4). Here Jesus seems to highlight the fact that he is bound by the mission that sets a boundary for him in terms of what he can and must do. In other words, Jesus is or lets himself be governed by the otherworldly decree that is issued and enacted by the Father. The only thing that motivates Jesus to move along the path towards the cross is his desire to do the will of the Father and to accomplish his work (4:34), and such willingness comes directly from Jesus's understanding of his identity as the one sent by the Father. In fact, every time Jesus uses the word θέλημα, it always refers to the will of the Father, not of himself (5:30; 6:38–40; 7:17; 9:31). Thus Jesus's thoughts, acts, and speeches are completely aligned with the will and the mission of the Father to the extent that it almost seems as if Jesus's autonomy is absorbed by the Father's salvific mission (8:28; 9:4).

Jesus's identity also shapes his behaviour towards people. As seen previously, in ch. 4 Jesus passes through Samaria and initiates a conversation with a Samaritan woman. From the woman's response to Jesus's action (4:9), it becomes clear that what Jesus is doing with the woman is neither culturally nor religiously appropriate (4:9; 4:27; cf. 8:48). Jesus is not, however, confined by Jewish custom but is rather led by his desire to do the work of the Father (4:34) that is to bring salvation to those in darkness even in the land of Samaria. Jesus's firm willingness to do the will of the Father results in many Samaritans coming to

199 Peter H.W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (BZAW 416; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 26–27.

the light, and it indicates the kind of missionary endeavour the disciples will be sent to accomplish. Jesus's healing of the invalid in ch. 5 also shows that Jesus's priority is to work the work of God even if that requires him to work on the Sabbath. Here Jesus's justification for healing on the Sabbath is found in his relationship with the Father (5:17) and "he [Jesus] is no more restricted by the Sabbath than the Father is."[200] The healing of the blind man in ch. 9 similarly shows that Jesus's first and foremost motivator of behaviour is his awareness of his identity as someone who is called to do the works of God (9:4). In other words, Jesus's activity is not limited by what is prescribed in the law or by traditional cultural norms but is motivated by what fulfills the works of God. Thus Jesus consistently proves his identity as the Son and the "sent one" through his complete obedience to the will of his Father.

2.4.2 Individuals' Identity and Their Behaviour in the Book of Signs

Having seen how Jesus's behaviour is shaped by his identity as the one sent by the Father, do we also see a similar pattern of causation among individuals? To see this connection between identity and behaviour more clearly, we will observe how faith or unfaith in Jesus leads people to behave differently. For example, in John 8 readers find Jesus's conversation with the Jews regarding their relationship to Abraham. There Jewish identity defined by their physical heritage to Abraham and by their fervent observance of the law is rejected outright by Jesus. Though Jesus does not deny the fact that the Jews have a right to be called the physical descendants of Abraham, Jesus rebukes the Jews for not doing the works of Abraham since they attempt to kill the one sent by God (8:40). The opponents think that they are doing God a favour by killing Jesus since Jesus is, according to the opponents, not only calling God his own Father but also making himself equal to God (5:18). The opponents' reaction is understandable since they do not see the true identity of Jesus, and the Torah, which is the central source of their identity, makes it clear that anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord should be stoned to death (Lev 24:16).

From the Johannine perspective, however, "Jesus's piously zealous opponents are the ones who are demonically leading the nation astray, not Jesus"[201] for the opponents are accusing Jesus on the wrong scriptural basis since Jesus exists before Abraham was (8:58) and thus is not bound by the Mosaic law. In fact, "Abraham has only a subsidiary role to play in the divine drama as a

200 Bultmann, *John*, 245.

201 Jason J. Ripley, "Killing as Piety? Exploring Ideological Contexts Shaping the Gospel of John," *JBL* 134 (2015): 605–635 (630).

witness of Jesus"[202] and consequently no longer defines or legitimates the Jews' identity. John rather makes it crystal clear that the Jews' identity as the children of God does not come from their physical connection to Abraham but only through a saving relationship with Jesus.[203] Therefore, it becomes clear that the obvious discrepancy between the opponents' self-claimed identity as the descendants of Abraham and their hostile behaviour towards Jesus reveals their identity as the children of the devil, not of God (8:44).

Contrary to the Jews, the story of Mary in ch. 12 offers an example of true discipleship and of how the growing understanding of one's identity affects one's behaviour. In the previous chapter readers have already encountered Mary in the story of the death and the resurrection of Lazarus, and there Mary is portrayed as an emotional character who does not seem to know what Jesus is capable of doing (11:32), whereas Martha explicitly expresses her faith in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (11:27). The same Mary is, however, introduced again to readers in ch. 12 somewhat differently than what readers saw in ch. 11. Mary is no longer overwhelmed by her emotions as seen in 11:32 but seems to have made a progress in her faith in and love for Jesus after witnessing Jesus raising her brother from the dead. In fact, Mary shows her respect for Jesus in a radical way by anointing the feet of Jesus with her expensive perfume and more surprisingly wiping them with her hair (12:3). Unlike Judas who "precipitate[s] the Hour by his betrayal,"[204] Mary becomes a prophetic figure who shows "significant insight into the imminence of Jesus's death."[205] Mary's growing faith in Jesus not only reinforces her identity as Jesus's disciple but also challenges her behaviour to offer Jesus what may be her costliest treasure.

It becomes evident that one's identity goes through an unparalleled transformation when one is truly born from above by believing in Jesus, and this new identity ultimately shapes one's behaviour as seen in Mary's wholehearted devotion to Jesus. Here we see a parallel between Jesus and Mary: Jesus's identity as the Son is confirmed by his perfect obedience to the Father and similarly Mary's identity as Jesus's disciple is confirmed by her unreserved love for Jesus. Therefore, van der Watt is correct to understand John's ethics as relational since

202 Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness* (NovTSup 118; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 194.

203 van der Watt, "Working the Works of God," 137.

204 Sandra M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church," *BTB* 12 (1982): 35–45 (43).

205 Susan Miller, "Mary (of Bethany)," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (eds. Steven A. Hunt, et al.; WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 473–486 (480).

it is the "relationship between the Father, the Son, and the disciples from which behaviour is motivated and determined."[206]

2.4.3 Identity and Behaviour in the Book of Glory

Coming to the *Book of Glory*, a person's identity is not only confirmed by one's love for Jesus but also by one's love for others including those who persecute them. In fact, one of the emphases that readers recognise in the Farewell Discourse is Jesus's warning of persecution of the believers. The reason the world hates Jesus and his disciples is that they do not belong to the world (15:19). What is more troubling is that those who put the believers out of synagogue and even kill them think that they are offering service to God (16:2). Here the opponents are obsessed with Torah fidelity but lack compassion for those who, in their opinion, proclaim conflicting beliefs. In truth, the opponents are not being loyal to the Torah at all because they are not willing to give Jesus and his followers a fair hearing as prescribed in the Torah (7:51) but all they want is to keep the status quo at minimal cost. In other words, their main concern is not about keeping their religious purity by guarding the truth but they simply want to get rid of any potential threat to their religious and political stability (11:48, 50). Thus their understanding of killing Jesus and the disciples as devotion to God is not based on the Torah but on their self-serving intentions and further confirms their identity as the children of devil (8:44).

The opponents' destructive demeanor is, however, powerfully countered by Jesus's selfless act of love which is initially shown in Jesus washing the feet of and giving of a morsel to Judas and ultimately reaches its peak in Jesus's crucifixion as seen previously in the discussion of love. Despite the opponents' hostile, evil intentions and behaviour, Jesus's love towards Judas who is the head of all opponents "overthrows the power-inscribed discourse lauding an ideology of violent praxis."[207] In fact, the closer the hour (ὥρα) draws near, the greater the disparity becomes between Jesus and the opponents in terms of their response to their adversaries. Jesus opposes any resort to arms or violence even to those who try to arrest and kill him (18:11), whereas the opponents resort to violence whenever possible to kill Jesus. Here we see the two radically different ways of keeping the Torah and thus showing their identity: the opponents display their identity by observing the Torah through "the violent means characteristic of this-wordily kingship (18:11, 36),"[208] whereas Jesus reveals his

206 van der Watt, "Works of God," 138.
207 Ripley, "Piety?," 632.
208 Ripley, "Piety?," ibid.

identity by presenting himself "as the true sacrificial martyr … nonviolent faithfulness unto death in love embodies the life-giving works of Torah pleasing to God."[209] Then the opponents' identity is coloured by their use of violence in keeping the Torah and the identity of Jesus and those who belong to him is coloured by their desire to do the will of God by means of nonviolence and love.

What has become clear is that there is a reciprocal interrelationship between identity and behaviour, and John strategically uses the preposition ἐκ as the overarching term that effectively sums up the Johannine notion of identity. From the literary perspective, it has become evident that those who are of this world are consumed with their desires to keep their religious, social, and political status quo for their own sake at all costs, whereas those who are not of this world prioritise the works of God without dismissing love for those who are against them.

2.4.4 Jesus's Kingdom and Its Ethical Implications

So far, the discussion has been centred around how one's identity plays a central role in shaping one's behaviour—the one whose identity is drawn from this world (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, cf. ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς, 3:6; ἐκ τῆς γῆς, 3:31; ἐκ τῶν κάτω, 8:23; ἐκ πορνείας, 8:41) acts according to the standards of this world, but the one whose identity is not drawn from his world (οὐκ … ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου; cf. ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος, 3:6; ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 3:31; ἐκ τῶν ἄνω, 8:23; ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 8:42) acts according to the standards that are different from the ones of this world. What needs to be stressed further is that it is not only Jesus's identity or origin that is not of this world but his kingdom is also said to be not of this world in 18:36, and those who belong to Jesus's kingdom must show their membership (identity) by consciously choosing Jesus as their king. Though the conjunction καθὼς is not used in 18:36, it is almost impossible for readers to miss the link between these two passages due to their semantic similarities (οὐκ … ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου). This particular passage appears in a very decisive moment of the narrative where Jesus stands before and is interrogated by Pilate. Due to the lengthy trial narrative[210] which spans 18:28–19:16, this section will selectively focus on the elements that are relevant to the issue at hand.

The trial narrative begins with the Jews bringing Jesus to Pilate.[211] It is not clear what accusations Jews brought to Pilate against Jesus but Pilate's question

209 Ripley, "Piety?," 633.

210 Most scholars follow Brown's structure, which breaks the trial narrative down into seven scenes. Brown, *John*, 2:857–859.

211 The characterization of Pilate as a weak and indecisive character is rejected by many

in 18:33, "Are you the King of the Jews (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων)?" shows that Jesus's charges are not only confined to the religious realm but also carries political implications (at least from Pilate's perspective).[212] Pilate's question in 18:33 resembles Caiaphas' prophecy in 11:50, where Caiaphas inadvertently prophesies the imminent death of Jesus, which is for the people (ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ). In a similar manner, Pilate's question to Jesus may have been intended to ridicule Jesus (cf. 19:2, 14, 19) but careful readers would recognise that Pilate is indeed saying more than he realises. As early as in 1:49, readers are told that Jesus is the King of Israel, and from the lips of Samaritans Jesus is said to be the Saviour of the world, and later in 12:13 the crowds hail Jesus once again as the King of Israel.[213] Though Pilate may think that he has the upper hand over Jesus in this trial setting, readers encounter a role reversal in 18:34 where Jesus takes the role of judge,[214] questioning Pilate regarding the source of his inquiry, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate then answers Jesus's question by distancing himself from the Jews, "Am I a Jew?," but from the literary perspective, Pilate is no different from the Jews since both the Jews and Pilate reject the one sent by God and thus fall under the judgment of God (3:18).[215]

What is noteworthy about the trial narrative is that it is Jesus who dominates and leads the flow of the conversation. Jesus does not speak to Pilate in a way that is expected of criminals, namely, showing submission and deference to the authority, but rather Jesus's interrogation more "resembles a diplomatic meeting than a trial treason."[216] In fact, Jesus openly announces that he possesses the kingdom, which is not of this world just like his origin,[217] and the fact that Jesus himself and his kingdom are not of this world shows that Jesus's author-

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scholars nowadays and his character is now considered to be multivalent. For the latest treatment of Pilate's characterization, see D. Francois Tolmie, "Pontius Pilate," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (eds. Steven A. Hunt, et al.; WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 578–600.

212 For a helpful discussion on whether or not John's ethics is political, see Harold Attridge et al., "Quaestiones disputatae: Are John's Ethics Apolitical?," *NTS* 62 (2016): 484–497.

213 On the Johannine irony, see Duke, *Irony*.

214 Jesus's role as king is intimately interconnected with his role as judge; see George L. Parsenios, *Rhetoric and Drama in the Johannine Lawsuit Motif* (WUNT 258; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 38.

215 Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup XIV; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 81.

216 Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 74.

217 Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 63.

ity surpasses any earthly powers (19:11).[218] Despite Jesus's superior authority and power as king, he is not interested in becoming one of the earthly kings, for he is sent for a much nobler mission, that is bearing witness to the truth (18:37).[219]

Jesus's kingdom has radically different social and ideological characteristics from those of this world, and such uniqueness becomes clear in Jesus's arrest where Jesus's disciples are not allowed to use any form of violence even in the face of losing their own king (18:36). In other words, the notion of kingship is completely redefined by Jesus "not by denying its political nature but by stipulating how Jesus's kingship is realised and who his 'subjects' are."[220] In that sense, Jesus dissociates himself not only from the Jews but also from Pilate because the interests of the Jews and Pilate do not intersect with those of Jesus since they are only able to see and approve the kingship that is of this world (19:10, 15). Therefore, Jesus utterly rejects those who try to make him king by force (6:15) since his mission is not to make people feel at home in this world (14:2–3)[221] but to make them sanctified in truth so that they bear witness to that truth as Jesus himself does (17:19; 18:37).

Jesus further clarifies what it means to belong to his kingdom in 18:37b, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." As many scholars have pointed out, this particular utterance by Jesus takes readers back to ch. 10, where Jesus is described as the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In this 'Good Shepherd' parable, the emphasis, however, is also equally placed on the response of the sheep to the shepherd's voice (10:27–28) as much as on the shepherd's selfless care. Put differently, though it is a shepherd who lays down his life for his own sheep, the sheep also must make a conscious decision to listen to and to follow the shepherd (10:4).[222]

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218 Rensberger, *Overcoming*, 97. Cf. Similarly argued by Ignace de La Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus According to John* (trans. Dom Gregory Murray; New York: Alba House, 1989), 68.

219 Andreas J. Köstenberger, "'WHAT IS TRUTH?': PILATE'S QUESTION IN ITS JOHANNINE AND LARGER BIBLICAL CONTEXT," *JETS* 48 (2005): 33–62 (45).

220 Rensberger, *Overcoming*, 97.

221 For social and political tensions between believers and the Roman Empire, see Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

222 Collins argues that following a shepherd carries ethical implications: "Were these 'sheep' humans rather than domestic animals, we would say that their behavior is characterized by three elements of an ethical life. The first is discernment. They distinguish between the one whom they follow and those whom they do not follow. This process of discernment is a matter of distinguishing one voice from the voice of several others. Second, the sheep's discernment results in action. Discernment is not forever buried in the psyche. Appropriate action follows the process of discernment. Discernment is translated into action that involves their entire being. Third, the action of the sheep is a matter of following

In a similar manner, Jesus's kingdom is composed of those who are willing to listen to the voice of Jesus and believe in the truth that Jesus brings to the world. Here John presents the two very different pictures of kingdom—in the earthly sphere, anyone who is born under the jurisdiction of a certain ruler is automatically subject to that ruler's reign but Jesus's kingdom operates on completely different terms since only those who are willing to listen to and obey Jesus's voice can be part of his kingdom. For that reason one must "decide *vis-à-vis* the Empire whether Jesus is his king or whether Caesar is."[223] Pilate's answer in 18:38, "What is truth?," shows that he does not belong to the truth. In fact, thoughtful readers would notice that Pilate's question is not fitting in John's Gospel since Jesus has already made evident that he himself is the ἀλήθεια (14:6), and thus Pilate's question should have been "Who is truth?"[224] Having seen the truth face to face, Pilate neither recognises nor is interested in knowing *what* or *who* the truth is but goes back outside immediately to the Jews without *listening* to Jesus's answer.

Pilate's misunderstanding does not stop there. He still believes that he has the authority (ἐξουσία) to either release or crucify Jesus (19:10). The word ἐξουσία is used five times (1:12; 5:27; 10:18(×2); 17:2) before the trial narrative, and nowhere in the Gospel has this word been used to indicate authority coming from the earthly realm—rather it always denotes authority coming from above. In fact, Jesus is the only one who has the authority to judge since the Father has given all (πᾶσαν) judgment to the Son (5:22). Readers then see how confused and mistaken Pilate is regarding "the true source of power,"[225] and Jesus's remark in 19:11—"You would have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above."—powerfully challenges Pilate that the authority he receives from Caesar is "imperfect and derivative, a pale shadow of the true and supreme power of the Father and the Son."[226] Not only is Pilate's author-

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the leader. It is a matter of having an example to follow." Collins, "'Follow Me,'" *Johannine Ethics*, 55.

223 Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 64. Cf. David Hill, "My Kingdom is not of this world," *IBS* 9 (1987): 54–62 (58); Reimund Bieringer, "My kingship is not of this world (John 18,36): The Kingship of Jesus and Politics," in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (eds. T. Merrigan and J. Haers; BETL CLII; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 159–175 (171).

224 Helen Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (SNTSMS 100; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 179.

225 Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John's Eternal King* (LBS 5; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 286.

226 Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John* (CBQMS 43; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007), 163.

ity like a mirage, but Pilate along with other Jewish authorities will also be held accountable[227] for crucifying Jesus (19:11b). Yet despite the opponents' evil scheme, John is at pains to make it clear that Jesus's death is in no way a result of human endeavour but of divine providence (3:14; 8:28; 10:18; 12:27, 32; 18:4, 11). In fact, Jesus's death in John's Gospel is never described in a tragic manner but is consistently depicted through the verb δοξάζω (7:39; 12:16, 23, 28; 13:31–32; 17:1, 4, 5). In other words, Jesus's death on the cross is not an event of humiliation but of glory because "there is honour in the humiliation of the cross and splendor in the degradation of the cross."[228]

It must be noted, however, that glory is not something that is bestowed upon Jesus only at the crucifixion but is something that Jesus shares along with the Father from eternity as the only Son from the Father (1:14; cf. 12:41), though Jesus's glory is not fully and vividly manifested until his glorification.[229] Despite Jesus's glory veiled by his σάρξ during his earthly ministry, the glory of God is still nonetheless radiated through Jesus's signs (2:11; 11:4, 40) since Jesus is the very embodiment of the divine glory (1:14; 2:11; 17:4, 22). More importantly, what makes Jesus's death even more glorious and honourable is that the cross is where Jesus completes the Father's salvific mission for fallen humanity, and the soteriological significance and effectiveness of the cross are confirmed by "the vindication of the resurrection and splendor in the Son's return to heavenly glory."[230]

Such understanding of glory and honour is, however, absent in the minds of the Jews and Pilate. The source of glory and honour for the Jews is very fleshly in nature since they seek glory from people (5:44; 12:43) and draw their honour from associating themselves with their patriarchs while rejecting the one sent by God (8:53; 9:28). Pilate, on the other hand, draws his glory and honour from Caesar whose kingship is in sharp contrast with that of Jesus since the

227 It is not clear to whom Jesus refers when he says τοῦτο ὁ παραδούς in 19:11 but whoever it might be (Judas or high priests collectively), Pilate will not go unpunished for his wrongful act.

228 Bauckham, "Glory," *Glory*, 43–62 (60).

229 Frey argues that Jesus's glory is portrayed in the Gospel from a post-resurrection perspective and that Jesus's salvific mission is culminated at the cross where he is glorified with δόξα that he did not possess beforehand. Jörg Frey, "'… dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen' (Joh 17.24) Zu Hintergrund, Sinn und Funktion der johanneischen Rede von der δόξα Jesu," *NTS* 56 (2008): 343–366. Unlike Frey who understands δόξα from a retrospective perspective, Nielsen argues that δόξα must be understood within the narrative sequence of the whole Gospel. Jesper Tang Nielsen, "The Narrative Structures of Glory and Glorification in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 56 (2010): 343–366.

230 Bauckham, "Glory," *Glory*, 60.

former coerces allegiance from the people through violence and oppression.[231] Knowing Pilate's absolute dependency on Caesar for his welfare and honour, the Jews threaten Pilate for putting Caesar's honour at risk by not crucifying Jesus who claims to be the king of an unknown kingdom (19:12). In fact, Pilate is described as a friend (φίλος) of Caesar and such a title is in sharp contrast with that of the disciples who are also described as friends of Jesus (15:14–15). Political friendship as seen between Pilate and Caesar is often threatened by personal ambition and interest and further forces them "to deceit, to bear one thing in the heart, another on the tongue; to value friendship and enmity not by desert but by profit; to show a respectable face rather than a respectable character."[232] In other words, political relationships easily fall when both parties are no longer committed to the same goal.

On the contrary, the friendship between Jesus and his disciples is formed and sustained by personal intimacy and mutual trust (affection) which enable both parties to engage one another in frankness (15:15) and self-denying love (15:13), both of which are the highly valued virtues in the ancient world. Furthermore, the Jews themselves become the blasphemers by acknowledging Caesar as their king (19:15), and this shows that they are more concerned with the religious and political stability than their allegiance to God. What happens in this trial narrative carries significant ethical implications since anyone who decides to join Jesus's kingdom must go through "a revolution of consciousness, the alienation of their allegiance away from the idolatrous and oppressive orders of the world toward the truth of God, the truth that makes free."[233] Rensberger is correct as long as "a revolution of consciousness" is concerned, but what he fails to mention is that Jesus's kingdom requires its followers to go through not only a revolution of consciousness but also of behaviour since the disciples are to share "Jesus's fate and destiny both as to its humiliation and its final exaltation."[234]

Then the important question arises: what motivates one to go through a revolution not only of consciousness but also of behaviour? The basic answer lies in our previous discussion on the glorious nature of the cross but a more helpful reading can be drawn based on one's understanding of 'honour and shame'. Though the concept of 'honour and shame' cannot explain every cultural phenomena in the ancient world, the majority of people in the Mediterranean world were nonetheless concerned about 'honour and shame', which were the

231 Flogging and putting a crown of thorns on Jesus (19:1–2) before the final verdict may show that Pilate's dealing with Jesus is unjust and repressive.

232 Culy, *Friendship*, 44.

233 Rensberger, *Overcoming*, 117.

234 de Boer, *Imitation of Paul*, 52.

vital social values. In fact, people in the first century were taught from an early age to pursue after honour and to avoid shame at all costs. The notion of 'honour and shame' was also more than the social values but played a crucial role in moral instruction. deSilva notes that "aversion to disgrace (shame) and defense of honor is to guide [people's] *conduct* in friendships, in enmity, in private life and in public office."[235] In other words, people behave according to their own understanding of what is honourable and shameful.

Reading the trial and passion narratives with this understanding of 'honour and shame', one can observe the two competing views of Jesus's crucifixion. Those who belong to the kingdom of this world such as the Jews and Pilate believe that they are humiliating Jesus by striking (18:22), binding (18:24), and undressing (19:23) him. John, however, writes the narrative of Jesus's arrest and crucifixion in a way that radically redefines the meaning of 'glory and honour' and thus subverts the common view that sees Jesus's persecution as a sign of shame.[236] As seen previously, Jesus is neither submissive nor helpless in his arrest, investigation, trial, and crucifixion but he consciously acts in a way that makes himself known to the world as the true King who willingly dies to take away the sin of the world (1:29). In fact, Jesus is not only in full control of what is happening to himself but permits it to happen so that the Scripture might be fulfilled (15:25; 19:28). Therefore, John carefully presents Jesus's crucifixion as a voluntary and honourable death.

There are two other incidents that confirm the honourable nature of Jesus's death. First, right after Jesus was crucified, Jesus asked his mother to see his beloved disciple as her son and then turned to the disciple to accept his mother as his own (19:26–27). The Jews and Pilate might have thought that Jesus's death would bring an ultimate end to the Jesus movement, but Hoskyns eloquently argues that the result was totally the opposite: "At the time of the Lord's death, a new family is brought into being. … The Church proceeds from the sacrifice of the Son of God, and the union of the Beloved Disciple and the Mother of the Lord prefigures and foreshadows the charity of the *Ecclesia* of God."[237] The

235 David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 24.

236 Neyrey helpfully explains how Jesus's trial scene can be understood in light of the honour-shame scheme. Jerome H. Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Perspective*, 412–438.

237 Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 2:631. Moloney argues that it is only after the hour that the new community of love is actually founded. Moloney, *Love*, 150. Coloe similarly argues that the footwashing represents the gesture of welcome into the household of God. See Mary Coloe, "Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 400–415.

gathering of believers has already been foreseen previously where a new people of God is said to include both 'the sheep of this fold' and 'the other sheep not of this fold' in 10:16 and 'nation' and 'the scattered children of God' in 11:52. It is the death and the resurrection of Jesus, however, that effects the actual gathering of God's new people. Such an establishment of a new family reveals that Jesus's death was not in vain but rather laid the foundation that brings forth fruits of love and unity among his followers (cf. 12:24).

Second, in ch. 21 Jesus has a final conversation with Peter after his resurrection where readers find the famous threefold confession of love by Peter. What immediately follows in 21:18 is Jesus's prediction of Peter's death and Jesus's firm imperative, "Follow me (ἀκολούθει μοι)." Readers know by now that ἀκολουθέω in John's Gospel denotes an unflagging commitment to Jesus and thus might wonder how Peter who has already blatantly denied Jesus to spare his own life could obey such a challenging demand.[238] The narrator has already mentioned numerous times that the disciples would come to a better understanding of Jesus's identity and ministry once Jesus is glorified (2:22; 7:39; 12:16). What is implied in that narratorial comment is that Jesus's crucifixion does not indicate a failure in Jesus's mission but is rather an integral part of God's salvific plan and an indispensable prerequisite to successful discipleship. In other words, Peter's courage to follow Jesus to the end can be obtained only after Jesus is glorified because Jesus's glorification (hence crucifixion) is what enables the disciples to progress both in their understanding of and commitment to Jesus.

Peter was unsure of the value and meaning of Jesus's death before Jesus's glorification and thus might have seen Jesus's death as a terrible end to a noble man's life. Having realised how honourable Jesus's death is later on, however, Peter goes through a radical transformation not only of his consciousness but also of his deed—the one who was once a coward becomes a good shepherd who later lays down his life for the sheep entrusted to him by Jesus. Such radical love and commitment that are expected of Peter are firmly based on Jesus's sacrificial death, which emerges implicitly as early as in 1:29, where Jesus is described as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and is developed further through the imagery of living bread that is given for the life of the world (6:51).

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238 Collins argues that a motif of following Jesus provides the ethical paradigm: "1. To follow Jesus is to avoid the manifold forms of evil symbolized by the paths of darkness. 2. To follow Jesus is to hear his voice with discernment and to accept him as Teacher and Lord, the source of a new way of life. 3. To follow Jesus is to join his flock and adopt its ethos. 4. To follow Jesus is to serve him and others. 5. To follow Jesus implies that one is drawn into Jesus's concern to feed the hungry—an ethical imperative of Jesus's day and ours." Collins, "'Follow Me,'" *Johannine Ethics*, 62.

The most explicit expression of Jesus's sacrificial love is found, however, in ch. 10 where Jesus is likened to a good shepherd who lays down for (ὑπὲρ) the sheep (10:11, 15; cf. 6:51; 11:51–52; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14). Here Jesus vividly exemplifies the kind of love that he is willing and ready to share with his followers—the love that seeks to benefit others at the expense of oneself. In fact, as previously noted, love and sacrifice always go hand in hand since the former almost always calls for the latter (15:13). Since imitating the example (ὑπόδειγμα) of Jesus is the ultimate goal of Johannine discipleship (13:15), Jesus's very act of laying his life down for the sake of others should also be fully embodied by his followers despite severe consequences. Yet it should be noted that it is not the soteriological efficacy of Jesus's death that is to be replicated in the lives of believers but a loving sacrifice that serves as a living testimony for Jesus (13:35). Furthermore, readers know by now that Peter's sacrificial death for the sheep is not a loss for Peter himself but a prerequisite for gaining eternal life (12:25). As Moloney rightly argues "the link between Peter and Jesus reaches beyond the pasturing task of the good shepherd; Peter is also to glorify God by his death, as Jesus did by his death (v. 19a; cf. 11:4; 12:27–28; 13:31–32)."[239] That is the kind of transformation that other disciples along with readers are expected to go through as they choose to belong to the kingdom of Jesus because they ought to find the greatest honour not in the power coming from Caesar but rather coming from a crucified Messiah. That is the Johannine way of overcoming the world and shaming the Jews and Pilate alike with love and honour that are only found ironically in the death of Jesus.

2.4.5 Conclusion

This section tries to uncover the ethical implications of Jesus's claim that he and his disciples are not of this world (οὐκ … ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου). Most commentators have glossed over these passages as if Jesus were simply making a sectarian claim or emphasising fixed origins. Such analyses do not do justice to Jesus's claim, which provides a rich reservoir for moral insights. The preposition, ἐκ plays a strategic role in revealing both Jesus's and the believers' identity, and I have tried to show how identity is inextricably linked to ethics by encouraging individuals to pursue moral integrity that is in harmony with a newly gained identity in Jesus. In other words, identity gives individuals a new moral paradigm by which one reprioritises one's old ethical values according to the truth found in Jesus. Those whose identities are transformed by their belief in Jesus see the glory that radiates from the cross of Jesus and thus are further chal-

239 Moloney, *Love*, 183.

lenged to follow Jesus as Peter did. It is then no coincidence that John closes his Gospel with the story of Peter who is not only reinstated after all but is also entrusted with the mandate that foreshadows his sacrificial death for the sheep (21:18). What is required of Jesus's followers is then an unswerving obedience to Jesus's calling, ἀκολούθει μοι (21:19), which might cost them even their own lives (12:24).

Conclusion

This study has been prompted by Meeks' influential objections against John's ethics, which have pushed John's Gospel aside in the discussion of New Testament ethics—Meeks' objections will be assessed briefly below. In light of Meeks' forceful criticisms, this study has tried to reexamine and even overturn the dominant scholarly view of John's Gospel as an ineffective and unhelpful companion for moral formation. In order to demonstrate the inadequacy of such claims, it has given extended attention to the moral landscape in the Greco-Roman world and has shown that the ancients had a vastly different moral framework, which would obviously cause difficulty for modern readers to draw ethical implications from ancient literature like John's Gospel. Based on such findings, it has been suggested that John's ethics should be approached and understood within its contemporary ethical and literary conventions and has found Plutarch to be the suitable model whose literary (rhetorical) practices and moralising techniques have turned out to be helpful in investigating John's ethics. Throughout this study, the overall aim has been to show how the progress of discipleship in John's Gospel is comparable to the ancient notion of moral progress, which generally begins with worldview transformation and culminates in imitation of a noble figure or more generally behavioural changes. In order to demonstrate the plausibility of the proposed thesis, this study was conducted in two phases.

Part 1 has focused on selected narratives in the *Book of Signs* and has tried to show how these narratives begin to shape readers' moral vision by bringing about a transformation in readers' worldview and values through evoking faith in Jesus. It has also argued that the much-neglected ethical quality of John's narratives can be drawn out when reading them in light of Plutarch's rhetoric of virtue, which enhances readers' moral sensibilities through critical engagement with narratives. The ethical significance of these narratives has often been overlooked by modern readers probably due to both the lack of reading skills that might have been natural for ancient readers and to long-standing assumptions about John's Gospel as being thoroughly Christo-theological. In fact, it is hardly obvious for modern readers to read biographical narratives for moral insight but our study of John's narratives in light of Plutarch's biographies reveals that one of the central functions of ancient narrative was to convey moral lessons. Meek's criticism that John's Gospel does not provide explicit ethical teachings does not seem to take into account of the moralising power of narrative which invites readers to creatively interact with various literary/rhetorical devices of the narrative that shape readers' moral reason-

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ing. As seen previously, explicit ethical teachings alone are neither effective nor persuasive in moral formation, and the complexities of human experience require more than rules of behaviour but a shared and transformative narrative through which one can continuously strengthen one's identity and examine one's moral strengths and weaknesses. Plutarch's biographies are the prime example of such descriptive or exploratory moralism, which aims to change readers' worldview and thus their behaviour through offering reflections on the human condition and shared human experiences instead of giving moral directives.

The analysis of the narratives of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the man born blind has indicated that John in the first twelve chapters uses similar narrative techniques to those found in Plutarch's writings in order to impact not only the readers' understanding of Jesus's identity and origin but also their moral outlook. As seen in Chapter 2, one's morality in the ancient world is heavily influenced by one's understanding of deity, which serves as the basic paradigm for one's behaviours and attitudes. Similarly, one's ethical journey in John's Gospel begins with one's belief in Jesus, which has a ripple effect that transforms people in other aspects of life that are fundamental to moral growth. In other words, all ethical deeds are subordinated to the deed of believing in Jesus in John's Gospel. In that aspect, Meeks' complaint that John's Gospel does not have any adequate moral agent who can guide others in moral behaviour must be reconsidered because in light of the priority of faith in Johannine discipleship (moral progress), the characters in the Gospel should be judged not by other ethical norms, but by their role in leading readers to Jesus. Furthermore, these characters are not only instrumental in revealing Jesus's identity and mission to readers but their narratives are full of implicit moral lessons that shape the readers' worldview and values and thus assist them to move on to the next phase of discipleship.

One of the advantages of reading the Gospel in the framework of moral progress is that narratives in the first twelve chapters become closely connected to each other as to shape John's moral worldview, which then functions as the foundation of moral formation. Such an ethical dynamic frees modern readers from the trap of viewing John's Gospel only as a spiritual book by offering a broadened horizon of ethics, and also helps readers view discipleship not as a journey towards some sort of mystical enlightenment but rather as a personal encounter with Jesus whose living presence through the Spirit leads to moral maturity. This kind of corrective is much needed in the study of John's ethics because ethical dimensions are often ignored and pushed aside especially in the first half of the Gospel due to the highly Christo-theological nature of the narratives. In order to view these narratives as an indispensable part of

the Johannine moral structure, this study has emphasised the transformative power of narrative, which strengthens the readers' affectional ties to Jesus and thus prepares them for the more challenging teachings of Jesus in the Farewell Discourses.

What also comes to the foreground in our analysis of the *Book of Signs* is the issue of determinism. Meeks strongly argues that John's ethics is ineffective for moral formation because ethical responsibilities in John's Gospel are blurred by its deterministic worldview. Unlike Meeks' objection against John's ethics based on its deterministic theology, the fact that John's narratives are carefully arranged in order to challenge the readers' existing theological/moral paradigm seems to indicate that John does not promote a clear-cut antithesis between determinism and free-will. In fact, if John believes that some are destined for damnation or salvation from the beginning, why would he bother to write such a sophisticated series of narratives to persuade his readers to believe in Jesus? Our analysis of the relevant passages has revealed that the Gospel portrays salvation as to highlight both God's drawing of a person to Christ and a person's voluntary response to that drawing. Furthermore, John makes it clear throughout the Gospel that it is people's love for glory and darkness that causes hardened hearts and persistent unbelief. The overall objective of Part 1 has been to show that the initial stage of discipleship closely resembles the initial stage of moral progress, where one is expected to go through a transformed worldview which ultimately leads to a new way of life. Such a transformation in worldview happens in the Gospel through one's understanding of Jesus's identity (Christology), which further triggers readers to move forward in moral progress (imitation of Jesus). Then John's moral vision is firmly anchored in the *Book of Signs*, which invites readers to a life of discipleship through a growing understanding of Jesus's identity and mission.

Part 2 has explored how readers, who have responded positively to Jesus's call to discipleship, are further challenged to move on to the second phase of discipleship by embodying the four moral traits exemplified by Jesus. Though these four traits do not represent an exhaustive list of a believer's moral character, they nonetheless cover a wide range of moral qualities that are crucial to discipleship and to living a sanctified life in the midst of persecution and more importantly in the absence of Jesus. What has been made clear in our lengthy discussion on the nature and the scope of imitation is that the ancients did not encourage the blind copying of their heroes' actions found either in real life or in biographies but rather the creative imitation of the *essence* of virtues demonstrated by those heroes. Similarly, the four moral traits exhibited by Jesus should also be emulated creatively by readers in a way that surpasses historical, cultural, and geographical constraints. When such moral potentials of imitat-

ing Jesus are recognised and realised in the lives of believers, one need not look for explicit ethical teachings since Jesus himself becomes the supreme example whose teachings and deeds offer a myriad of moral guidelines and parameters that are applicable to all people in all times and in all contexts.

In the analysis of the Farewell Discourse, this study has found that the conjunction καθώς plays a strategic role, which helps us identify the four moral traits (love, mission, unity, and otherworldly status) displayed by Jesus. What is interesting about the use of καθώς in John's Gospel is that καθώς takes a nuance of mimesis predominantly in the second half of the Gospel, and this shows that imitating Jesus is expected of those who have already achieved a significant progress in their journey of faith. In other words, John encourages his readers to imitate Jesus only at the second half of the Gospel because readers first need to be grounded firmly in their knowledge of Jesus's identity and mission—this fits the general pattern of moral progress well. Without such groundwork, one cannot successfully move on to the next phase of discipleship, namely, the imitation of Jesus.

The evaluation of the four moral traits has also revealed the inadequacy of Meeks' another claim that the Gospel offers an unusual narrative world that is subversive and countercultural. Contrary to Meeks' allegation against John's ethics, our analysis of 'love' and 'mission' has indicated that John's Gospel does not promote anti-social or countercultural stance but rather encourages its readers to approach and inspire the outsiders with the same love that is shared by the insiders. Moreover, even the notion of otherworldliness does not promote the sectarian attitude but motivates believers to deal with their persecutors with love and non-violence. What has become clear in this investigation is then that belief in Jesus is not an end in itself but must challenge believers to be transformed in their thoughts and deeds in the likeness of Jesus. Following Jesus without such moral obligations is not an acceptable form of discipleship in the Gospel. Thus believers are called not only to share in the glory that Jesus acquired on the cross both for himself and also for his followers (17:22) but also the responsibility of being sanctified by the truth (17:17) so that their lives may become a living testimony to the world that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and the Son of God (20:31).

The biographical focus of this study has restricted the scope of our investigation to the figure of Jesus and other individuals. There is another important internal dynamic, however, that assists individuals in moral progress—the Spirit. How does the Spirit guide believers in the absence of Jesus? Unlike the characters in the Gospel who are yet to experience the Spirit at first hand (7:39), readers live in the period when the Spirit is fully available and active. Surprisingly the role of the Spirit in the Gospel unfolds similarly to the way moral

progress develops from the readers' post-resurrection perspective. Later generations of readers can discover in the first twelve chapters of the Gospel that the role of the Spirit is to bring people from darkness to light by witnessing Jesus to the world (1:32–33), to lead people to new birth (3:5–6, 8, 34; 6:63), and to bring about a transformation in terms of belief and values (4:23–24). In the Farewell Discourse, however, the role of the Spirit is extended to empowering believers for the time of Jesus's absence (14:18) and for the purpose of effectively witnessing to the world (15:27) by making Jesus ever-present in the lives of believers (14:20–21, 23; 15:26; 16:14) and by teaching and reminding them of all that Jesus has taught (14:26) and finally by leading them into the truth (16:13) while convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8).

These empowering activities of the Spirit are especially critical in moral formation since readers are not simply called to believe in Jesus but to be Jesus-like in a world full of conflicts and falsehood. Furthermore, since readers of this Gospel are no longer able to interact directly with the incarnate Jesus, they also must be constantly taught and reminded of Jesus's teachings and deeds so that they fully understand and appreciate the significance of Jesus's ministry on earth and thus are motivated to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Through the Spirit, Jesus becomes more than a historical figure from the past but a living presence in the lives of all believers. In other words, the Spirit not only brings new insight to believers and helps them remember the works and words of Jesus but also offers an avenue by which believers have a living relationship with Jesus even after his return to the Father. Such an enabling work of the Spirit is what makes the Gospel a living text whose message continues to speak to believers of all generations and thus enables them to move forward in moral progress by imitating Jesus. Therefore, further studies on the role of the Spirit in moral formation would greatly advance our current understanding of John's ethics.[1]

This study has begun with Meeks' four criticisms, which have contributed significantly to the negative view of John's ethics and our brief analysis of Meeks' claims above has proven to some extent that Meeks' objections against the effectiveness of John's ethics must be reassessed in light of our ethical reading of John's Gospel and also of recent scholarly developments in this area. Though John's Gospel may not contain many explicit ethical rules, the absence of such concrete directives ironically makes John's ethics timeless. It is timeless because instead of giving a set of specific behavioural guidelines, John's ethics first focuses on fundamental human qualities that draw readers' atten-

1 See Bennema, *Mimesis*, 186–191 for the latest treament on the role of the Spirit in moral formation.

tion to the more profound questions that deal with one's being, worldview and identity. These are the qualities that are applicable to anyone regardless of time, situation, and social status. Furthermore, having ethical values embedded within narratives has the benefit of providing the moral framework that is connected to the larger story which offers a solid Christo-theological foundation for readers' newly acquired moral vision.

When the Gospel is read in such a way, John's narratives become an overflowing stream of moral insight that is neither fragmentary nor isolated but is rather shared and confirmed by the wider believing community that is also transformed by the same teachings and examples of Jesus. Then what readers find at the end is a paradox: if readers read the Gospel of John for spiritual formation, they will naturally end up reading it for moral formation since spiritual awakening in John's Gospel always leads to moral awakening.

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